NATION

ISRO de-docks SpaDeX mission sats

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Gold reclaims all-time high level of ₹89,450/10g

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SPORTS

Satwik-Chirag pair enters All England second round

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 14 MARCH 2025 | FRIDAY | BENGALURU | 13 RAMADAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 71 | Pages: 8

Manipur Naga MLAs meet Guv, pledge support for peace

IMPHAL, 13 MARCH

Six MLAs from the Naga community met Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan on Thursday and apprised him of the problems faced by the common people, a statement from the governor's house said. The MLAs assured that "they will extend their cooperation at every step to ensure peace" and expressed confidence that "the state will return to peace and normalcy," it added. They also called on the Governor and submitted a memorandum requesting "steps to be taken for the welfare of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the district who are residing in various relief camps." — *PTI*

Cong leader calls Madhuri Dixit '2nd-grade actor'

JAIPUR, 13 MARCH

Leader of Opposition in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly, Congress leader Tika Ram Jully, has stirred a political controversy by referring to Bollywood actor Madhuri Dixit as a "second-grade star" while speaking in the House. Jully was criticising the presence of fewer Bollywood celebrities at the International Indian Film Academy Awards (IIFAA) and questioned the award's impact on the state. "More than Rs 100 crore given for IIFA event. No major Bollywood stars were present. Some cite Madhuri Dixit's presence. Madhuri second-grade actor these days... her prime has gone.
— *Agencies*
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Double-decker flyovers to ease B'luru traffic

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Thursday announced that double-decker flyovers, tunnel roads, buffer roads, elevated corridors, and other infrastructure projects to ease Bengaluru's traffic congestion.

"We are planning double-decker flyovers wherever new metro lines are being developed. The BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) and BMRCL (Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited) will share the cost equally. It costs Rs 120 crore to construct one kilometre of a double-decker flyover, and we have allocated Rs 9,000 crore for the project," he said, in a release issued by his office.

Additionally, 300 km of 50-feet-wide buffer roads will be built along stormwater drains to ease traffic, with Rs 3,000 crore earmarked for this initiative. We have planned two tunnel roads – 17 km stretch from East to West and a 23 km stretch from North to South. Tenders for the first phase will be called soon, Shivakumar said opining that while Bengaluru was not a planned city, earlier proposals by KJ George to build a steel bridge on Bellary road was met with stiff opposition increasing the cost seven times today for the tunnel roads.

"We are also building roads through the issuance of TDRs (Transferable Development Rights). A notification has been issued for a 7.8 km road from Hebbal to Hennur. In total, 320 km of new roads are under construction in Bengaluru," he added.

Furthermore, Shivakumar announced an allocation of Rs 9,000 crore for the white-topping of 1,682 km of roads. "We have taken a Rs 2,000 crore loan from the World Bank to construct 850 km of stormwater drains. Of this, 480 km has already been completed," he added. —*PTI*

TN drops ₹ for Tamil letter in Budget

This comes amid language tussle with Centre

CHENNAI, 13 MARCH

Amid a fierce language tussle with the Centre, the Tamil Nadu government has replaced the Devanagari rupee symbol with a Tamil letter in its logo for the budget 2025-26, which will be tabled in the state Assembly on Friday.

The logo for the budget, released by the government on Thursday, carried 'ru' the first letter of the Tamil word 'Rubaai' which denotes the Indian currency in Tamil.

The logo also had the caption "everything for all," indicating what the ruling DMK claims is its inclusive governance model. While the move drew the ire of the BJP, the ruling DMK wondered if any rule barred such a depiction.

Slamming the Stalin government's move, BJP TN chief K Annamalai asked the chief minister how stupid he could be to do it.

"Thiru Udhay Kumar, who designed the symbol, is the son of a former DMK MLA. How stupid can you become, Thiru @mkstalin?" he said in a social media post.

IIT Guwahati Professor D Udaya Kumar, who had designed the Indian rupee symbol, on Thursday however refused to be drawn into the controversy over language. "It was a mere coincidence that his father was a DMK MLA", Udaya kumar a post-graduate in Design from the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay said.

Responding, DMK spokesperson Saravanan Annadurai said no law "opposed or stopped using Ru in Tamil. Then why such anger," he asked in a post on 'X.'

Senior BJP leader and former state unit chief Tamilisai Soundararajan questioned why the change was made after so long and if they have "become Tamil now."

"They are against national integrity, national unity," she charged.

The ruling DMK and other major political parties in the state have been opposing the three-language policy under the National Education Policy, alleging that it was an attempt to impose Hindi by the Union government, which has denied the charge. —*PTI*

The logo for the budget, released by the government on Thursday, carried 'ru', the first letter of the Tamil word 'Rubaai' ***PHOTO: X***

Mineral exploration licences go on auction

The licences are for, zinc, diamond, copper

PANAJI, 13 MARCH

Union Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy on Thursday launched nation's first-ever auction of Exploration Licences (ELs) for 13 exploration blocks for critical minerals.

Reddy launched the ELs in the presence of Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant in Dona Paula near here, a major reform aimed to unlock India's untapped critical and deep-seated mineral resources.

The licences are for the exploration blocks for minerals like REE (rare earth elements), zinc, diamond, copper, PGE (platinum group minerals) and others.

The programme also featured a roadshow on the 5th Tranche of Critical Mineral Blocks and the launch of AI Hackathon 2025, a Mineral Exploration Hackathon focused on "Mineral Targeting using AI" (Artificial Intelligence). The exploration possibilities have been contemplated from multiple states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Karnataka, he said. The exploration access would be granted exclusively, which would empower private companies to explore up to 1,000 square metres per licence, Reddy said. Under the EL regime India introduced in amendment to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act in 2023, licence holders will explore these blocks, and if viable mineral reserves are found, the blocks will be auctioned for a mining licence (ML). The EL auction process follows a reverse bidding mechanism, where the block is awarded to the bidder quoting the lowest percentage share of the auction premium payable. —*PTI*

Why are critical minerals important?

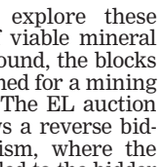
In 2023, India identified over 20 minerals as "critical" for energy transition efforts and to meet the growing demand from industries and the infrasector.

What will the licence allow:

The exploration access would be granted exclusively to private firm, which will allow them to explore up 1,000sqm per licence.

The blocks up for auction are

- Karnataka (gold and copper)
- Chhattisgarh (diamond)
- Jharkhand (gold and copper)
- Maharashtra (tantalum and zinc)
- Andhra Pradesh (REEs)
- Arunachal Pradesh (zinc)
- Gujarat (vanadium)
- Madhya Pradesh (platinum-group elements)



Minerals will be used in:
Electronics, renewable energy, defence, aerospace.

FITCH REMOVES ADANI FROM NEGATIVE RATING

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Fitch Ratings has removed Adani Energy Solutions Ltd from a rating watch and assigned it a negative outlook following the US indictment of its key executives.

Fitch Ratings affirmed Adani Energy Solutions Limited's (AESL) long-term foreign- and local-currency issuer default ratings at 'BBB-'.

"The ratings have been removed from Rating Watch Negative and assigned a Negative Outlook," it said in a statement.

The rating agency said the Adani group has "demonstrated adequate funding access" after its chairman Gautam Adani and two other key executives were indicted in the US court on allegations of being part of a bribery scheme.

"We believe the risks associated with the group's liquidity and funding requirements have moderated," it said.

Fitch said it will monitor the investigations for any evidence of weakness. The indictment, it said, reflects a corporate governance risk for AESL.

"A conviction or any indication of weaknesses in Adani group entities' governance practices and internal controls that may come to light as part of the process could put pressure on the ratings."

Fitch Ratings affirmed the 'BBB-' rating on Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited.

"The Outlook is Negative to reflect our view that the proceedings and outcome of the US investigations could reveal that the group's corporate governance practices are weaker than we expected." —*PTI*

City woman electrocuted

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

A 58-year-old woman was electrocuted while attempting to operate a water pump illegally connected to Cauvery pipeline in Chamarajpet early on Thursday.

The deceased, identified as Selvi Murugan, was a resident of Anandapura First Cross, near Vinayaka Theatre. The incident occurred around 3.30am. Chamarajpet police have registered a case and launched an investigation.

As news of the incident spread, around 60 local residents gathered on Mysuru Road in protest, demanding compensation for the victim's family and a permanent solution to the ongoing water shortage. They insisted that local MLA BZ Zameer Ahmed visit the site and lend ear to their grievances.

Local residents also alleged that police arrived after several hours of being informed.

Minister Zameer Ahmed visited the spot and assured the protestors that the government will address the water connection issues. The protest was called off after the minister's visit. The incident has exposed the rampant illegal tapping of Cauvery water. Because of the supply becoming erratic, many consumers have allegedly installed pumps in the pipeline to extract water. An Assistant Executive Engineer (AEE) with the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) said Selvi was drawing power illegally to run the pump. "This area is a slum. Despite having legal water connections, residents frequently install pumps to extract water directly from the pipeline. Unfortunately, while attempting to fix the wiring, she was electrocuted," he said. —*Salar News*

PAK BLAMES INDIA FOR TRAIN ATTACK

Pakistan accused India of "sponsoring terrorism" on Thursday without directly implicating it in the Balochistan train attack that killed 21 passengers. Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan at the weekly press briefing was asked several questions about the deadly attack on Tuesday, which led to a hostage situation lasting for more than 24 hours. —*PTI*
>>>More on Page 3

British woman raped, molested in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

A British woman was allegedly raped and molested by two men at a hotel in Delhi's Mahipalpur area, a police official said on Thursday. Police have arrested both men and informed the British High Commission about the incident that happened on Tuesday night.

The British national came to India a month ago and stayed in Maharashtra for some time, before travelling to Goa. On Tuesday, she came to Delhi allegedly to meet the 24-year-old Kailash who had befriended her on Instagram earlier. They then made plans to meet each other in Delhi after which she reportedly travelled from Goa to Delhi and booked a room in a hotel in Mahipalpur. "She was allegedly first molested by a housekeeping staff in the hotel's lift. Later, she met Kailash who allegedly raped her in a hotel room," Deputy Commissioner of Police (South West) Surendra Chaudhary said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

K'taka mulls raising retirement age of docs

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

The Karnataka government is actively considering increasing the retirement age of doctors serving in super-speciality hospitals under the medical education department, from the current 60 years to 65.

During an interaction with doctors at Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research on Thursday, Medical Education and Skill Development Minister Sharan Prakash Patil said the government is keen on extending the retirement age to retain experienced doctors in super-speciality hospitals.

The move comes in response to concerns raised by senior doctors at Jayadeva, who pointed out that after spending years in medical education and training, they only get to serve around 20-25 years before retiring at 60.

"We have been deliberating on this issue for some time. To ensure better healthcare services and make the most of our experienced doctors, I will soon discuss the matter with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and propose raising the retirement age for doctors in super-speciality hospitals," Patil said. —*PTI*

AFTER 3 YEARS OF WAR

Putin agrees 'in principle' with US deal for 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine

MOSCOW, 13 MARCH

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that he agrees in principle with a US proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine, but the terms need to be worked out, and he emphasised that it should pave the way to lasting peace.

"But there are issues that we need to discuss, and I think that we need to discuss it with our American colleagues and partners," HE SAID.

He noted the need to develop a mechanism to control possible breaches of the truce. Another issue, he said, is whether Ukraine could use the 30-day ceasefire to continue mobilization and rearmament.

Putin noted that while it appeared that the US persuaded Ukraine to accept a ceasefire, Ukraine is interested in that because of the battlefield situation, noting that Ukrainian troops that launched an incursion into Russia's Kursk region would be fully blocked in the coming days.

"In these conditions, I believe it would be good for the Ukrainian side to secure a ceasefire for at least 30 days," he said.

Referring to the Ukrainian troops in Kursk, he said: "Will all those who are there come out without a fight?"

Putin thanked US President Donald Trump "for paying so much attention to the settlement in Ukraine."

He also thanked the leaders of China, India, Brazil and South Africa for their "noble mission to end the fighting to casualties," a statement that signalled those countries' potential involvement in a ceasefire deal. Russia has said it will not accept peacekeepers from any NATO members to monitor a prospective truce. —*PTI*
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CBSE to hold Class 12 Hindi exam again due to Holi

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

CBSE Class 12 students unable to appear in Hindi exam scheduled on 15 March on account of Holi will get another opportunity write the paper, the board announced on Thursday. CBSE Examination Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj said that because the celebrations might "spill over", the board decided that while examination would be held as per schedule, the students who find it difficult to appear may choose to write the paper on a later date. "Though the festival of Holi would be celebrated on 14 March in most parts of the country, in few places, either the celebrations would take place on March 15 or celebrations would spill over to 15 March. —*PTI*

Woman held for murdering friend in Mysuru

MYSURU, 13 MARCH

A women was arrested for the alleged murder of her 65-year-old friend, identified as Sulochana, in the first week of March. The accused, Shakunthala, 45, resides in the JP Nagar area of the city and had been friends with Sulochana for several years. On the evening of 5 March, Shakunthala invited Sulochana to her house, where she locked the victim in her room and strangled her using a pillow. After the murder, Shakunthala removed a 50-gram gold chain from Sulochana's neck. Two hours later, she called Sulochana's son, Ravichandra, claiming that his mother had collapsed and needed help. They transported her body to a private hospital, where doctors declared her dead on arrival. Despite Shakunthala's attempts to mislead the family, by the victim's daughter raised suspicions, prompting an alert to the police. On 8 March, police arrested Shakunthala. During questioning, Shakunthala admitted to the crime, revealing financial struggles as the motive. The police later recovered the stolen gold chain from a pawn shop. *—Salar News*

Learning festival launched in Chitaguppa

CHITAGUPPA, 13 MARCH

A cluster-level children's learning festival was inaugurated at the Udbal government lower primary school, aiming to identify and nurture hidden talents among students. Taluk Area Education Officer Venkatesh Goodal emphasised the crucial role teachers play in this endeavour. The festival focused on basic literacy and numeracy, with students showcasing their abilities in storytelling, fluent reading, and drawing, in preparation for the upcoming SSLC exams. Goodal expressed optimism about improved results this year due to new learning initiatives. Rajappa Jamadar, Taluk President of the Primary School Teachers' Association, urged educators to prioritise quality education over politics, while District Association President Ravindareddy Malipatil called for prompt resolution of teacher-related issues. *—Salar News*

MM Hills temple hundi logs ₹2.85 cr in 20 days

MYSURU, 13 MARCH

The Malemahadeshwara Hills temple has registered a hundi collection of Rs 2.85 crore in the past 20 days in Hanur talu of Chamarajanagar district. The counting of the hundis was held in the presence of Salur Brihanmutt seer Shantha Mallikarjunaswamy, near the bus stand on Wednesday. It went on till late at night under strict CCTV surveillance. The collection also includes 27 grams of gold and 1800 grams of silver, sources said. The temple's executive secretary M Raghu said the number of devotees visiting the temple increased owing to Mahashivarathri, Amavasya and the Shakthi Scheme of free travel for women. *—Salar News*

CM writes to Stalin, asks DKS to attend delimitation meet

Siddaramaiah will skip the meet due to prior commitments

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah acknowledged the importance of the issue
PHOTO: PTI

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday extended support to the DMK-led opposition against the proposed delimitation of Parliamentary constituencies and requested his deputy, DK Shivakumar, to attend the meeting in Chennai to discuss the issue.

In a letter to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, Siddaramaiah stated that he would be unable to attend the meeting due to prior commitments.

"I have received your letter dated 7 March, which raises crucial issues regarding the autonomy of states, with serious implications for the principles governing our polity. In particular, the issue of delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies based on new population benchmarks needs to be discussed at length by like-minded states. Although I would like to participate in the meeting, due to my prior commitments, I am unable to do so," he wrote in the letter dated 13 March.

However, acknowledging the importance of the meeting scheduled for 22 March, the CM said, "I have requested Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to participate in the deliberations."

On Wednesday, Tamil Nadu Forest Minister K Ponmudy and Rajya Sabha MP Mohammed Abdullah Ismail met Siddaramaiah at his residence, Cauvery, to discuss the ongoing protests against the "anti-democratic and anti-Southern stance of the central government."

During the meeting with the DMK delegation, the CM condemned the Centre's attempt to "weaken democracy and federalism."

The DMK has been reaching out to leaders of various parties, including those in the NDA, such as Chandrababu Naidu, to discuss the delimitation issue. —PTI

'NO NEED FOR PARALLEL PROBE'

HM downplays CID's withdrawal in Ranya case

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

G Parameshwara
PHOTO: MOHAMAD ASAD

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday said there was no pressure on him to withdraw a CID probe in gold smuggling by Kannada actress Ranya Rao.

The Minister said that because the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (DPAR) ordered appointing Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta to probe the possible role of Ranya's step-father K Ramachandra Rao, a DGP rank officer, a parallel investigation was not needed.

"In the meantime, the Chief Minister's Office also gave direction to the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms since he is an IPS officer. So we decided not to order inquiry by our police department and let the DPAR probe it," he said.

State government had withdrawn its order for a CID investigation into the lapses of duty by police deployed at the Kempegowda International Airport, within 24 hours of pronouncing it. *—PTI*

Chargesheet filed in arrest of 22 Pakistanis

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

The Jigani police have completed the investigation into the arrest of 22 Pakistani nationals residing illegally on the outskirts of Bengaluru. A chargesheet has been submitted to the Anekal Judicial Magistrate of the First Class Court, detailing their illegal entry and forged documents.

The prime accused, Rashid Ali Siddiqui, has been confirmed as a Pakistani citizen, with investigators recovering his permanent residence certificate from Pakistan. The other arrested include men, women and a minor girl, all of whom allegedly entered India illegally.

According to the chargesheet, they travelled from Pakistan to Bangladesh before sneaking into India and obtained fake Aadhaar cards, birth certificates and even Indian passports.

In September 2024, Jigani police raided a residence near Rajapura village, uncovering their identities. During interrogation, the accused admitted to being from Lahore and claimed to have fled persecution in Pakistan due to their affiliation with the Mehdi Foundation International. They had been residing in India using Hindu identities.

Their stay in Bengaluru allegedly was facilitated by an Indian named Parvez Ahmed alias Fervez, who was arrested in October. *—Salar News*

GP member accused of sexual harassment

KALABURAGI, 13 MARCH

In Maragutti village, Kamalapur Taluk, Kalaburagi district, a Gram Panchayat member has been accused of sexual harassment by a woman seeking assistance for government housing. The incident involves Neelakanta Rathod, who allegedly propositioned the woman after she requested a house.

Reports indicate Rathod told the woman, "I will arrange for a house, but you must sleep with me. If you can't come, at least send your daughter." This shocking demand prompted the woman, to file a complaint at the Kamalapur police station.

Rathod reportedly demanded money for the housing arrangement, which she said she could not afford. Following her allegations, police have registered a case against him under sections 75, 78, and 79 of the BNS Act.

Rathod was elected to the Maragutti Panchayat from Malasapura village. The community is awaiting the outcome of the police inquiry. *—Salar News*

MINISTER ACCUSES BJP OF LOOTING STATE, CALLS THEM 'SHAMELESS'

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

State Minister Ramalinga Reddy criticised the BJP, and called them "shameless" . His remarks followed the submission of a report by the Nagamohan Das committee to CM Siddaramaiah.

Reddy accused the BJP of "looting the state" during their four-year rule, asserting that they are now attempting to undermine the Congress. "Let the report come. Then people will know who looted Karnataka," he said.

The report investigates allegations of a 40 percent commission on government contracts made by the previous BJP government. *—ANI*

KEEPING IT COOL

A man waters a garden in Bengaluru on Thursday. The city had a maximum temperature of 35° Celsius
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

National-level athlete dies by suicide in B'luru

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

A 26-year-old women's volleyball coach and national-level basketball and volleyball athlete allegedly died by suicide at her residence in Adugodi, police said.

The deceased, Soniya, was found hanging from the ceiling fan in her room. The incident came to light around 10.00am when her family members went to call her for breakfast, only to discover her unresponsive. She was rushed to a nearby hospital, but declared dead on arrival.

Adugodi police, who registered an Unnatural Death Report, said the reasons behind her extreme step remain unclear.

Soniya was an accomplished athlete, having played in state and national-level basketball and volleyball tournaments for the past eight years. She was looking forward to participating in an international tournament in Dubai next month. *—Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

Mysuru cops urge resorts to ensure safety of tourists

MYSURU, 13 MARCH

Following the gang-rape of a foreign tourist in Hampi, Karnataka, Mysuru police convened a meeting with resort and homestay owners on Thursday to discuss enhanced safety measures for visitors. Superintendent of Police N Vishuvardhan urged owners to ensure the safety of all tourists, particularly foreign nationals, in the wake of the recent attack on an Israeli female tourist near the UNESCO heritage site.

The police mandated that prior permission must be obtained when taking tourists to remote locations, with homestay owners held accountable for any incidents involving anti-social elements or wildlife. They were also instructed to review itineraries to avoid risky destinations. *—Salar News*

Six injured in City LPG cylinder explosion

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Six people, including a toddler, were injured after an LPG cylinder exploded at a house in Nagappa Reddy Layout, Kaggadasapura, in Byappanahalli police station limits on Thursday morning.

The impact of the blast was severe, causing three walls of the house to collapse, police said.

The injured have been identified as Manjunath, 34; Pavithra, 32; Aneesh, 33; Mamatha, 32; Ishan, 3; and Hanumanthappa, 70. They were immediately rushed to Victoria Hospital for treatment.

According to preliminary reports, the explosion occurred around 6am when a family member attempted to switch on a gas geyser connected to the LPG cylinder.

According to officials, during the rescue operations, Fire and Emergency Services personnel were shocked to find 10 commercial LPG cylinders and three 5-kg cylinders stored inside the house.

It is suspected that either the house owner or a tenant may have been involved in unauthorized LPG distribution or illegal refilling activities.

Joint Commissioner of Police, East, Ramesh Bhanot, confirmed that police teams inspected the site and registered a case at Byappanahalli police station.

"The injured have been hospitalized, and investigations are underway to determine why such a large quantity of LPG cylinders was stored in the house. We are probing whether the house owner or tenant was involved in illegal gas distribution," he said. *—Salar News*

The wall of the house cracked due to the explosion. Six, including a toddler were injured in Bengaluru on Thursday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

IN BELAGAVI

Govt worker abused for not speaking Marathi

BELAGAVI, 13 MARCH

Incidents of abuse against Karnataka government employees persist in Belagavi taluk, with the latest report involving a Development Officer verbally attacked by a Marathi speaker for not issuing documents in Marathi. This marks the third such case in just one month.

Tippanna Subhash Dokre allegedly confronted Kiniye Gram Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) Nagendra Pattar, demanding documents in Marathi.

The confrontation escalated, with Dokre reportedly threatening Pattar and insisting he communicate in Marathi. In response, Pattar informed Dokre that he was bound by government directives to communicate in Kannada.

A Development Officer was allegedly verbally attacked for not issuing documents in Marathi
PHOTO: PTI

Following the altercation, which occurred during office hours, Pattar filed a complaint with the Belagavi rural police, leading to Dokre's arrest for threatening and obstructing government work. He has since been incarcerated in Belagavi prison.

Earlier incidents include an attack on Karnataka government bus conductor Mahadevappa Hukkeri, who was assaulted for not conversing with passengers in Marathi, and a recent case involving panchayat secretary Nagendra Kodli, who was beaten by a gang for similar reasons.

In light of these events, Kannada organisations, led by Vatal Nagraj and Sa Ra Govindu, have protested against the harassment of employees and are calling for a ban on the pro-Maharashtrian organisation Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES).

They are also organising a Karnataka bandh on 22 March. *—Salar News*

5 held in interstate crime crackdown

MANGALURU, 13 MARCH

Five notorious interstate criminals involved in multiple cases across State and Kerala were arrested, police said.

Police Commissioner Anupam Agarwal said the arrests led to the recovery of three pistols, six live bullets, 12.89 kg of cannabis and three vehicles.

Agarwal said that acting on a tip-off, the Central Crime Branch police intercepted a suspiciously moving car on Wednesday at Natekal in Mangaluru.

During the raid, they arrested Noufal, 38, and Mansoor, 36, both residents of Kasaragod.

"The estimated value of the seized items is Rs 14.6 lakh," Agarwal said. Probe revealed that Noufal has six drug trafficking cases against him in Kerala. Mansoor has four cases, including drug smuggling and issuing life threats.

PHOTO: PTI

In another operation on the same day, the police intercepted a red car transporting banned narcotics from Kerala to Mangaluru. The accused had planned to sell the contraband in the city. Abdul Latif, alias Thoku Latif, 29, a native of Kasaragod, was arrested, and a large quantity of cannabis was seized, police said. *—PTI*

BSP FLAYS BUDGET FOR IGNORING SC, ST, MUSLIMS

MYSURU, 13 MARCH

Bahujan Samaj party state president M Krishnamurthy on Thursday accused the government of betraying the SC/ST and Muslim communities and backstabbing them with poor allocation of grants in its budget.

Representatives of Muslims said that the government did not allocate even one per cent of the total budget outlay for the community, which constituted nearly 16 per cent of the population in the state.

CM Siddaramaiah claimed to have allocated Rs 42,000 crore, but diverted Rs 23,000 crore, they alleged. The state also meted out injustice by allocating only Rs 488 crore to eight development corporations belonging to SC/ST communities, they said. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

Paper leak: RaGa says students' future at risk

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said examination paper leaks were a "systematic failure" and asserted that the "serious problem" would be eradicated only when all political parties forget their differences to take strict steps together. He said the future of 85 lakh children in six states is at risk as paper leak has become the most dangerous "padmavyuh" for our youth. "Paper leaks put hardworking students and their families into uncertainty and stress, taking away the fruits of their hard work. It also sends wrong message to the next generation that dishonesty can be better than hard work, which is completely unacceptable," he said on X. *—PTI*

Andhra BJP MLA slams govt as cops impose Holi curbs

HYDERABAD, 13 MARCH

The Hyderabad police have announced restrictions ahead of Holi celebrations, banning the movement of vehicles in groups and prohibiting the throwing of colours on unwilling individuals. This has drawn sharp criticism from BJP MLA Raja Singh, who labelled the police notification a "Tughlaq farman" (Tughlaq order). The order, effective from 6 PM on March 13 to 6 AM on March 15, aims to maintain public order. Additionally, wine and toddy shops will be closed from 6 AM to 6 PM on 14 March. Singh accused the Congress government of issuing the restrictions, questioning why similar measures aren't enforced during Ramzan when group movements are common. He alleged the Congress is "anti-Hindu" and suggested that the government should have appealed for cooperation between communities during Holi instead. *—PTI*

Court schools SP MLA Azmi over Aurangzeb remarks

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

A Mumbai court has urged Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Azmi to exercise restraint during media interviews, warning that "irresponsible" comments from a senior politician could incite riots. The caution was issued while granting Azmi anticipatory bail in a case regarding remarks he made praising Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Additional Sessions Judge VG Raghuwanshi highlighted the need for discretion, noting the volatile nature of religious sentiments following the recent release of a film about Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, a revered figure in Maharashtra. Azmi faced charges under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for allegedly insulting religious beliefs. *—PTI*

BJP MLA's 'Muslim wing' remark draws RLD leader's ire

LUCKNOW, 13 MARCH

RLD leader Rohit Agrawal said BJP MLA Ketki Singh's demand for a "separate wing for Muslims" in the proposed medical college was "inappropriate and objectionable". RLD is an ally of the BJP-led NDA. Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) leader Agrawal strongly condemned the BJP leader's remarks, saying, "Our cultural ethos is based on 'Sarva Dharma Sambhav' (equal respect for all religions). A public representative advocating a separate ward in a hospital for a particular community is inappropriate and objectionable." Ketki Singh recently stoked a controversy, claiming Muslims "often express discomfort" during Hindu festivals. "Muslims should have a separate wing and building in the medical college (in Ballia) so that Hindus remain safe. Who knows what they might spit into our food?" she remarked on Monday. *—PTI*

Pakistan accuses India of 'sponsoring terrorism'

Pak says India is trying to destabilise its neighbouring countries

ISLAMABAD, 13 MARCH

Pakistan accused India of "sponsoring terrorism" on Thursday without directly implicating it in the Balochistan train attack that killed 21 passengers.

Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan at the weekly press briefing was asked several questions about the deadly attack on Tuesday, which led to a hostage situation lasting for more than 24 hours.

"Terrorists were in direct communications with Afghanistan-based planners throughout the incident," he said, adding that Pakistan has repeatedly asked Afghanistan to deny the use of its soil for terrorist groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) for their attacks against Pakistan.

"We urge Afghanistan to hold perpetrators, organisers, financiers, of this reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and cooperate with the government of Pakistan to bring all those who are concerned with this attack, including the real sponsors of terrorism to justice," he said.

An injured victim of a passenger train attacked by insurgents, receives treatment upon arrival at a hospital in Quetta, Pakistan *PHOTO: PTI*

When asked about any change of policy because India was blamed in the past for any activity by the BLA, while this time finger was pointed towards Afghanistan, the spokesman said there was no change in the policy.

"There is no shift in our policy. And again, the facts have not changed. India is involved in sponsoring terrorism against Pakistan. What I was referring to was, in this particular incident, we have evidence of calls being traced to Afghanistan. This is what I said," he responded.

To another question, he said that India has been trying to destabilise its neighbouring countries and running a global assassination campaign.

"The latest terrorist attack against Jaffar Express near Sibi Balochistan was also orchestrated and directed by terrorist ring leaders operating from abroad," he said.

Responding to another question, he said that the "Indian media is kind of glorifying the BLA which itself reflects the Indian policy, in some ways, if not officially".

The spokesperson also said Pakistan was pursuing a complex and multi-faceted anti-terrorism strategy, which involves military action, intelligence-based operations and diplomatic approach. *—PTI*

FROM COMPETITION TO COLLABORATION

PM devised Starlink deal to please Trump: Congress

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Congress party has raised concerns over recent partnerships announced by telecommunications giants Airtel and Jio with Starlink, alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi orchestrated these agreements to curry favour with US President Donald Trump via Starlink owner Elon Musk.

Congress general secretary for communications Jairam Ramesh pointed out that within a span of just 12 hours, both Airtel and Jio revealed their partnerships with the satellite internet provider, seemingly disregarding previous objections they had raised against Starlink's entry into India.

"It is abundantly clear that these partnerships have been orchestrated by the PM himself to buy goodwill with President Trump through Starlink's owner Elon Musk," Ramesh claimed. He further emphasised that essential questions linger, particularly regarding national security. "Who will have the power to switch connectivity on or off when national security demands it? Will it be Starlink or its Indian partners? Will other satellite-based connectivity providers also be permitted, and on what basis?" he questioned in a post on X. Ramesh also broached the significant matter of Tesla manufacturing in India, speculating whether there is now a commitment to facilitate this following Starlink's entry into the market.

Jairam Ramesh *PHOTO: PTI*

The partnership between Jio Platforms and SpaceX comes after months of negotiation over how Musk's venture should secure spectrum rights in India. In a surprising turn, it follows a similar agreement made between Airtel and SpaceX.

Over the past few months, rivals Jio and Airtel had come together to demand an auction for awarding spectrum for satellite services in India as they feared an administrative allocation would give Musk airwaves at a price lower than what they had paid via auctions in the past. Under the new agreement, Jio will offer Starlink equipment in retail outlets and online stores and also support customer installation and activation on devices. Jio and SpaceX will also explore how they can boost each other's offerings. Starlink is the world's largest low-earth-orbit (LEO) constellation operated by SpaceX. *—PTI*

Karat refutes rumours on Tharoor joining CPI(M)

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

In light of recent speculation regarding Shashi Tharoor's future within the Congress party, CPI(M) interim coordinator Prakash Karat has firmly dismissed the notion of the Thiruvananthapuram MP joining the Left party. Karat stated on Thursday that Tharoor has never indicated intentions to "desert" the Congress.

Karat commended Tharoor, describing him as a politician who is not "run-of-the-mill." He noted that Tharoor possesses unique views that might sometimes prove "inconvenient" for the Congress. The speculation surrounding Tharoor sparked after he published an article in an English daily praising the entrepreneurial growth in Kerala under the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government. This drew criticism from Congress while CPI(M) welcomed his remarks. Tharoor later clarified that he did not intend to praise the CPI(M)-led government but aimed to highlight the state's progress in the start-up sector. *—PTI*

₹2,000cr scam: Prez nod for FIR against Sisodia, Jain

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

President Droupadi Murmu has given her approval for the registration of an FIR against AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain in an alleged scam of Rs 2,000 crore in the construction of classrooms in Delhi government schools, sources said.

In 2022, the Delhi government's vigilance directorate recommended a probe into the alleged scam and submitted a report to the chief secretary.

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), in a report dated 17 February, 2020, highlighted "glaring irregularities" in the construction of classrooms in Delhi government schools by the Public Works Department (PWD).

Manish Sisodia; Satyendar Jain *PHOTOS: PTI*

Reacting to the development, senior AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj accused BJP of carrying out a witch-hunt against its political rivals.

In July 2019, BJP leader Harish Khurana and then AAP rebel MLA Kapil Mishra, now a minister in the Delhi government, lodged a police complaint about the alleged scam. According to a report prepared by the Anti-Corruption Bureau of the Delhi government, the complainants alleged that there was a scam worth over Rs 2,000 crore in the construction of classrooms and school buildings in Delhi. The work was done at a highly inflated cost by the Delhi government. The alleged scam involves the construction of around 12,748 classrooms. *—PTI*

FOLLOWING IIFA EVENT

Cong leader calls Madhuri Dixit 'second-grade actor', stirs row

JAIPUR, 13 MARCH

Leader of Opposition in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly, Congress leader Tika Ram Jully, has stirred a political controversy by referring to Bollywood actor Madhuri Dixit as a "second-grade star" while speaking in the House.

Jully was criticising the presence of fewer Bollywood celebrities at the International Indian Film Academy Awards (IIFAA) and questioned the award's impact on the state.

"More than Rs 100 crore given for IIFA event. No major Bollywood stars were present. Some cite Madhuri Dixit's presence. Madhuri second-grade actor these days... her prime has gone. She was a star in the times of her movies like 'Dil' and 'Beta', Jully said.

"Except for Shah Rukh Khan, all were second-grade actors. No first-grade actor attended", he added.

Madhuri Dixit; Tika Ram Jully

PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM/ANI

Meanwhile, the Congress party distanced itself from the Jully's remarks, citing these could be his "personal view".

BJP leader and Rajasthan's Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari said, "Every actor should be respected... Jully said something absurd about a woman actor; he shouldn't have said that". The new controversy comes days after Congress Spokesperson Shama Mohamed faced flak for 'fat shaming' Indian cricket team captain Rohit Sharma on social media. BJP MLA Balmukund Acharya defended IIFA's importance, stating that "Rajasthan hosted an event of IIFA's stature, which usually takes place in mega cities across the world."

He highlighted the global exposure and tourism benefits the event brought to the state. *—Agencies*

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy with DMK MP Kanimozhi and others on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

Revanth to attend Stalin's delimitation meet

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday said that he would attend DMK's Chennai meeting against the proposed delimitation. Reddy said he backed the fight but was awaiting approval from the Congress' High Command.

Reddy made these remarks after a DMK delegation led by Tamil Nadu minister TK Nehru met him in Delhi and invited him to the meeting.

"I welcome Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin's stand. I have to get permission from the (Congress) high command to attend the meeting. In-principle, I have agreed to attend," Reddy said.

Earlier this month, Stalin had written to chief ministers of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, Punjab and Odisha, inviting them to a meeting to form a joint action committee with Tamil Nadu against the delimitation exercise. Stalin had also written to the heads of political parties. The meeting is set to take place on 22 March. Stalin had termed delimitations as a "blatant assault on federalism".

Reddy further said the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre was "conspiring" against the southern states with delimitation.

"Delimitation is going to be a limitation for the south. We are not going to accept delimitation at any cost," he said.

Reddy emphasised that the southern states paid more taxes than their northern counterparts and were "contributing everything for the nation".

Union Home Minister Amit Shah earlier assured the southern states that they wouldn't lose "even a single seat" after the delimitation of constituencies. *—PTI*

- Earlier this month, Stalin had written to chief ministers of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, Punjab and Odisha, inviting them to a meeting to form a joint action committee against the delimitation exercise

Holi critics should exit India: UP Minister

GORAKHPUR, 13 MARCH

Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister and NISHAD Party Chief Sanjay Nishad on Thursday said that those who have a problem with Holi colours should leave the country.

With Holi and Friday prayers during Ramzan falling on the same day this week, some political leaders in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have made controversial remarks, suggesting Muslims should stay indoors till noon or cover themselves with tarpaulin when coming out of their homes to avoid any inconvenience during the Holi celebrations.

Speaking at a Holi Milan event in Gorakhpur on Thursday, Nishad hit out at opposition parties, claiming some of their leaders were trying to create divisions in society. He accused them of misleading people by linking religion with Holi celebrations.

"People embrace each other during Friday prayers and they do the same while celebrating Holi. Both are festivals of togetherness, yet some politicians don't want this unity. A certain section is being misled by poisoning their minds, and they, too, are citizens of this country. If they have issues with colours, they shouldn't just stay indoors...they should leave the country," he said.

Sanjay Nishad *PHOTO: ANI*

Nishad, the state fisheries minister, also emphasised that a particular section of society uses colours extensively, whether in clothing, home decor or businesses. With Holi and Friday prayers coinciding this year, the Uttar Pradesh administration has ramped up security. *—PTI*

Kerala CM condemns attack on Tushar Gandhi

T'PURAM, 13 MARCH

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday strongly condemned the alleged "Sangh Parivar attack" on Tushar Gandhi, the great-grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, which took place in the state a day earlier.

He also warned against attempts to block the visits of national and international figures to Kerala.

A day after a group of men, reportedly RSS-BJP workers, raised slogans against Gandhi in Neyyattinkara, urging him to withdraw a statement he had made against the RSS, Vijayan said that the mindset of those behind this act was no different from that of those who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi.

"This is highly condemnable. Actions that suppress freedom of expression cannot be allowed in a democratic society. Legal and democratic measures will be taken against such tendencies," the Chief Minister said in a statement.

Tushar Gandhi *PHOTO: ANI*

The Chief Minister noted that in Neyyattinkara, Tushar Gandhi had expressed his concern "that the soul of the nation was being afflicted by the cancer of communalism."

Speaking at an event organised to unveil the statue of the late Gandhian P Gopinathan Nair, Gandhi remarked that both the UDF and LDF, despite their long history of political rivalry in the state, must recognise a more dangerous and insidious threat—RSS and BJP.

Meanwhile, a case was registered against five people reportedly RSS-BJP workers in the case. *—PTI*

TMC PASSES RESOLUTION AGAINST SUVENDU

KOLKATA, 13 MARCH

The West Bengal assembly passed a resolution on Thursday, brought forth by the ruling TMC against Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari, following his contentious comments regarding Muslim TMC MLAs. The resolution was approved via a voice vote.

TMC chief whip Nirmal Ghosh moved the resolution after BJP members staged a walkout in protest, as Speaker Biman Banerjee declined their request for a discussion concerning a calling attention motion proposed by BJP. Ghosh claimed that Adhikari's comments attacked social fabric of the nation. Adhikari had previously asserted that if BJP came to power, Muslim MLAs from TMC would be "thrown out" of the Assembly. This prompted a fierce response from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who accused BJP of bringing "fake Hinduism" into West Bengal. *—PTI*

HC quashes plaint against singer Kailash Kher

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

Intolerance and dissent from the orthodoxy have been a bane of Indian society, the Bombay High Court said quoting author AG Noorani, while quashing a complaint against singer Kailash Kher for allegedly hurting religious sentiments with a song on Lord Shiva. A division bench of Justices Bharati Danger and SC Chandak said there was no deliberate or malicious intent on Kher's part, who had only sung the song Babam Bam, to hurt anyone's religious sentiments or feelings. The complaint was filed by one Narinder Makkar, who claimed to be a Shiva worshiper, before a local court in Ludhiana, seeking registration of a case against the singer under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 295A and 298, concerning outraging religious feelings with deliberate and malicious intent. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Kerala Dalit thinker and writer KK Kochu dies at 76

KOTTAYAM, 13 MARCH

Noted Dalit thinker and writer KK Kochu died on Thursday at the Government Medical College Hospital in Kerala's Kottayam town at the age of 76. Hospital sources said he breathed his last while undergoing treatment for cancer. Born on 2 February 1949 in Kallara near Kottayam, Kochu retired as a senior assistant from the KSRTC in 2001. In recognition of his contributions, he was awarded the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 2021. Condoling Kochu's demise, CPI(M) State Secretary MV Govindan said he was a personality who tirelessly wrote and worked to highlight the lives of Dalits in the country and to secure their rights. "We share the grief of his family and fellow activists at his passing," Govindan said. —*PTI*

Family of four found dead in Chennai house

CHENNAI, 13 MACH

Four members of a family including two teenage sons were found dead in their residence in the Tamil Nadu capital on Thursday, police said. The bodies of the doctor—advocate couple and their two sons were found in two separate rooms, police said and added that they could have ended their lives by hanging. The incident came to light after the doctor's driver came for work today and getting suspicious, informed the police who upon opening the door found the doctor Balamurugan, 52, and his wife Sumathy, 47, in one room and their sons in another room of the residence in Anna Nagar. The Thirumangalam police who have registered a case suspect it to be suicide reportedly due to mounting debts. Further investigation is on. —*PTI*

Stray dog found carrying dead infant in MP town

REWA, 13 MARCH

A video has surfaced on social media, showing a stray dog carrying a dead infant between its jaws on a busy street. The incident was reported in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa on Tuesday night. The visuals show bikers chasing the dog while recording the dreadful sight on their mobile camera. The viral clip further shows a street dog running on the road late in the evening, carrying a dead baby, covered in blood, with its teeth. The sight sent shockwaves among the passersby. Details regarding whose baby was the dog carrying or whether the stray killed the baby are yet to be ascertained. There are speculations that the dog must have found the dead body from a nearby hospital premises. —*Agencies*

23 Yamuna sites fail Parl panel's water quality test

Delhi Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma takes a boat ride on river Yamuna in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

A parliamentary panel has said the Yamuna river's capacity to sustain life have been found to be almost non-existent in the Delhi stretch, noting that 23 out of the 33 monitored sites, including six in the national capital, failed to meet primary water quality standards.

The Yamuna flows through a 40 km stretch in Delhi, entering at Palla from Haryana and exiting at Asgarpur into Uttar Pradesh.

The dissolved oxygen (DO) levels, which reflect the river's capacity to sustain life, were found to be almost non-existent in the Delhi stretch, the parliamentary standing committee on water resources said in its report tabled in Parliament on Tuesday.

In its report on the Upper Yamuna River Cleaning Project and river bed management in Delhi, the panel warned that despite the construction and upgrade of sewage treatment plants in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, pollution levels remain alarmingly high. The Committee called for a coordinated response from all stakeholders to tackle pollution and restore the river's health. It added that out of the 33 monitored sites, only four in Uttarakhand and four in Himachal Pradesh met the primary water quality criteria.

The Central Pollution Control Board assessed water quality at 33 locations between January 2021 and May 2023, with state pollution control boards. The assessment covered four key parameters of Dissolved Oxygen, pH, Biochemical Oxygen Demand, and Fecal Coliform. The analysis showed that all four monitored sites in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh met the required standards, while all six sites in Haryana failed. In Delhi, none of the seven sites complied with the standards in 2021, although the Palla site showed improvement in 2022 and 2023.

The panel also raised particular concerns over encroachment along the Yamuna floodplains. While Delhi and Haryana provided information on encroachments, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand are yet to furnish complete details. —*PTI*

CBI, Kerala cops nail crypto firm owner wanted in US

Lithuanian Besciokov is accused of funding terror outfits

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The CBI and Kerala Police have arrested Lithuanian national Aleksej Besciokov, who is wanted by the United States for setting up cryptocurrency exchange Garantex, allegedly to launder the proceeds of criminal activities, including ransomware, officials said on Wednesday.

He was arrested when he was allegedly plotting to escape from the country, officials said.

According to the US Secret Service documents, Besciokov, during 2019–25, allegedly "controlled and operated" Garantex, which facilitated money laundering to the tune of at least USD 96B B in cryptocurrency transactions by transnational criminal organisations (including terrorist organisations) and violated sanctions.

"Garantex received hundreds of millions in criminal proceeds and was used to facilitate crimes including hacking, ransomware, terrorism and drug trafficking, often with substantial impact to US victims," it said.

It said Besciokov was Garantex's primary technical administrator and responsible for obtaining and maintaining critical infrastructure of the platform as well as reviewing and approving transactions.

The indictment documents cited by the Secret Service said Besciokov is charged with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

He is also charged with one count of conspiracy to violate the International Economic Emergency Powers Act – which also carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in person – and with conspiracy to operate an unlicensed money-transmitting business, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

"On a request submitted by the USA, the Ministry of External Affairs, acting under the Extradition Act, 1962, got issued a provisional arrest warrant on 10 March, 2025 against the subject from ACJM Patiala House Court in Delhi. The IPCU, CBI coordinated with Kerala Police for the arrest of fugitive criminal Aleksej Besciokov. The subject would be produced before the Patiala House Court by the Kerala Police," CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

He is wanted for facing trial before the United States District Court for the Eastern District Court of Virginia, it said. —*PTI*

Aleksej Besciokov **PHOTO: PTI**

CRIMELINE

- Aleksej Besciokov, 46, set cryptocurrency exchange Garantex and laundered the proceeds of criminal activities, exceeding USD 96B, for global criminal and terror groups
- The US, Germany and Finland recently dismantled Garantex's online infrastructure
- The US announced charges against two administrators of the exchange last week
- On US request, the Indian MEA invoked the Extradition Act, 1962, and got a provisional arrest warrant issued on Besciokov on 10 March, 2025

A CCTV video grab of the night in Mohali; Abhishek Swarnkar (Inset) **PHOTO: Screengrab X**

IISER scientist killed in parking dispute

CHANDIGARH, 13 MARCH

An Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) researcher died after he was pushed to the ground following heated exchanges with his neighbour over a parking dispute in Mohali, police officials said on Thursday.

The incident occurred when Abhishek Swarnkar was parking his motorbike and his neighbour objected to it.

Soon a heated argument ensued following which Monty allegedly pushed Swarnkar (39) and he fell on the road. Monty then charges at the researcher who is still on the ground but is quickly pulled away, according to CCTV footage of the incident.

The video shows the scientist first standing up with help from those around but collapsed again. He was taken to a hospital where he was declared brought dead, police said. The accused took the victim to the hospital, they added.

Police said Swarnkar was undergoing dialysis as he was suffering from a kidney problem. He hailed from Jharkhand and was staying in a rented accommodation in Mohali with his parents. He was a researcher at IISER. —*PTI*

UP's Yogi plans curbs on prayers on loudspeakers

VARANASI, 13 MARCH

UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday called for permanent noise control measures for religious places. While reviewing development projects and law and order at the Circuit House, he also directed officials to strictly prohibit high-volume DJs during Holi celebrations, a statement said.

Yogi instructed officials to install CCTV cameras at key locations, such as banks, financial institutions, shops, and commercial establishments. He ordered a strict monitoring of cattle smuggling, warning of stern action against smugglers, vehicle owners, and any complicit police personnel.

Yogi Adityanath **PHOTO: PTI**

"Adityanath also focused on accelerating development projects, warning against delays and directing officials to appoint nodal officers for each under-construction project, conduct weekly inspections, and submit progress reports. Upon observing delays in some projects, he ordered officials to speed up the work while ensuring quality," a government statement read. —*PTI*

ONGC laxity leads to gas leak in AP

KESANAPALLI, 13 MARCH

Lack of maintenance at the ONGC's gas collection station in Konaseema district resulted in Hydrogen Sulphide gas leak, said an official on Thursday.

District collector R Mahesh Kumar said the gas leaked around 2.30 pm on Wednesday had affected about nine persons, including workers and a four-year-old child. "Because of anaerobic respiration of micro-organisms there was some accumulation of H2S gas (Hydrogen Sulphide). This is a result of lack of maintenance of those wells," said Kumar.

The gas collection station has six units and H2S leaked when ONGC workers were trying to wash a well near Gollapalem. —*PTI*

UNITED IN PRAYERS

Women take part in Attukal Pongala in Chennai on Thursday. During this festival, women prepare Pongala – rice cooked with jaggery, ghee, coconut and other ingredients, traditionally in earthen pots – as an offering to Goddess Attukal Devi, whom they worship and believe as the one who fulfils the wishes of her devotees and provide prosperity. **PHOTO: PTI**

ASI begins work on painting Jama Masjid in Sambhal

SAMBHAL, 13 MARCH

An Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) team on Thursday carried out measurements and assessments ahead of the planned whitewashing and renovation work of the Shahi Jama Masjid, officials said.

The move comes a day after the Allahabad High Court directed the ASI to undertake and complete whitewashing of the Jama Masjid within one week.

Zafar Ali, president of the Shahi Jama Masjid committee, told reporters that the ASI team from Meerut was carrying out surveys to determine the scope of work and prepare an estimate. The mosque committee will the work. — *PTI*

HOLI CELEBRATED AT KARTIKEYA AFTER 46YRS

SAMBHAL, 13 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Amid tight security, devotees on Thursday celebrated Holi at Kartikeya Mahadev in Khaggu Sarai for the first time in 46 years.

The event saw enthusiastic participation from social and Hindu organisations at the temple, which was reopened last December after it was shut following riots in 1978.

Additional Superintendent of Police Shreesh Chandra said ample police forces have been deployed to ensure a smooth celebration. "Holi is being celebrated peacefully at the Kartikeya Mahadev Temple in Khaggu Sarai. There is no need for anyone to worry. People are enjoying the festival in a secure environment," he said. —*PTI*

Bihar police officer killed in scuffle

ARARIA, 13 MARCH

An assistant sub-inspector (ASI) died after a scuffle between police personnel and a group of people broke out in Bihar's Araria district, an officer said on Thursday.

The incident occurred in Lakshmipur area under the jurisdiction of Phulkaha Police Station on Wednesday night. A police team had gone there to nab a person, and subsequently, a brawl broke out between the personnel and those protesting the arrest, Araria Superintendent of Police Anjani Kumar said.

"The incident took place when the ASI along with other police personnel went to Lakshmipur to nab Anmol Yadav, wanted in a case. When the police team arrested Yadav, locals started protesting. The accused was taken away by locals and the ASI fell unconscious during the scuffle," the SP said, identifying the ASI as Rajeev Ranjan.

The ASI was rushed to the nearest hospital, where he died during treatment, Kumar said.

"Investigations have revealed that the ASI was not assaulted by the locals. Investigation is on...and the exact cause of death can only be known after the post-mortem report," he said. —*PTI*

ANOTHER MILESTONE

ISRO de-docks SpaDeX mission sats

The process culminated in the separation of the SDX-01 and SDX-02 satellites that were launched on December 30, 2024 PHOTO: X

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Indian Space Research Organisation on Thursday announced the successful completion of its SpaDeX mission's space de-docking.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh hailed the ISRO team after the "SPADEX satellites accomplished the unbelievable de-docking" and said that the event was "heartening for every Indian."

"This paves the way for smooth conduct of ambitious future missions including the Bharatiya Antriksha Station, Chandrayaan 4 and Gaganyaan," Singh said in a post on X. "PM Modi's continuous patronage keeps the spirits soaring," He said.

The undocking process involved a precise sequence of events, culminating in the separation of the SDX-01 (Chaser) and SDX-02 (Target) satellites that were launched on December 30 in 2024, using Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)-C60, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

It included the extension of SDX-2, the planned release of Capture Lever 3, and the disengagement of the Capture Lever in SDX-2. After these maneuvers, the decapture command was issued in both SDX-1 and SDX-2, leading to the successful separation of the satellites. —*ANI*

IIT-G suggests 'walks with teachers' to beat suicides

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

PHOTO: ANI

Ice-breaking sessions for new students during their first week on campus, morning walks with faculty members, mandatory counselling sessions and comprehensive medical check-ups and stress escape room workshops are part of IIT-Guwahati's plan to ensure students' mental well-being and prevent incidence of suicides.

The measures come after the institute faced massive protests last semester following back-to-back cases of student suicides.

According to Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Guwahati Director Devendra Jalihal, the institute has chalked out a comprehensive plan to prevent suicides among students.

"We have established a dedicated mental health and counselling system in the form of a Centre for Holistic Wellbeing. SAATHI Counselling Club, a part of this centre consisting of student volunteers, supports fellow students in their mental and overall wellbeing with the help of professional counsellors," he said. —*PTI*

EARTHEN BLOOD

Social media is abuzz with visuals of a beach turning blood red after rain in Iran's Hormuz. Known as the Red Beach, the region is mineral rich, creating a phenomena termed 'blood rain', when water runs over the iron-oxide soil on the cliffs. Also known as the 'Rainbow Island,' the place has become a year-round tourist attraction
PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/ HORMOZ_OMID

Sambhal: When train with Hajj pilgrims was stopped on Holi

It was Holi of 1999, the very day Hajj pilgrims were to take a train from Uttar Pradesh's communally sensitive town of Mau to Delhi. The situation was fraught - till the administration imposed prohibitory orders to temporarily stop the train so the pilgrims in white didn't come face to face with the drenched in colour revellers.

Twenty-six years later, it is another Holi and another coincidence. The festival falls on a Friday during Ramzan and the administration in various states, particularly in Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh, is on its toes to ensure 'jumma' prayers and Holi pass off peacefully.

That spring of 1999 and the predicament of the authorities in Mau has been recalled in detail in former Uttar Pradesh director general of police (DGP) OP Singh's book "Through My Eyes: Sketches from a Cop's Notebook".

The authorities in Mau served the prohibitory order on loco pilot (train driver) after the Railways refused a request from the authorities to delay the afternoon train by a few hours till Holi festivities end, he writes.

"It was the first time in India's history that an order under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), a law typically used to prohibit unlawful assemblies and prevent disturbances, was invoked not to control a mob, but to stop a moving train," the former state police chief says in the chapter titled "The Train under 144 CrPC".

The soon to be published book, accessed by PTI, has multiple anecdotes from Singh's 37-year policing career.

Mau, a region known for its rich yet delicate communal fabric, had found itself at the heart of an unprecedented administrative decision in 1999.

"A seemingly routine train schedule had the potential to disrupt peace, but an extraordinary step ensured that harmony prevailed."

That year Holi coincided with the departure of a sizable population of Hajj pilgrims who were scheduled to board a train from Mau to Delhi, their first stop before flying to Mecca.

Police forcefully stopped a train carrying Hajj pilgrims from Mau in Uttar Pradesh to Delhi on Holi in 1999 fearing that even 'unintentional provocations' could spark communal clashes in the region
PHOTO: PTI

"The train was scheduled to arrive at noon, exactly when Holi celebrations would be at their peak. Streets would be filled with revelers throwing coloured powders and water, the air thick with the scent of festive sweets and burning pyres of Holika Dahan from the previous night," he writes.

The Muslim pilgrims, the chapter says, dressed in white clothes would have had no way of passing through without being inadvertently caught in the revelry and the district administration foresaw the problem.

Sensing that any "unintentional provocation" may "ignite tempers" in the district that had a history of communal skirmishes, the authorities sought the help of the Railway authorities "with a simple request: delay the train by a few hours".

The country's largest public transporter refused, stating that train schedules could not be altered for local events, no matter how sensitive the situation was and that "operational punctuality" was foremost for the Railways.

"The district administration took a bold and unprecedented step. The prohibitory order was served directly to the train driver, legally preventing the train from proceeding beyond a designated railway station in a neighboring district," the former DGP wrote.

Police and other government authorities were deployed alongside the train that, as per Singh, remained "stationary for a few hours", by the "sheer force of law."

The Holi celebrations "died down slowly" and the pilgrims boarded the train without disturbance, their white robes unstained, their hearts set on their spiritual voyage, he writes.

While the decision to delay the train was "extraordinary and controversial, it demonstrated a profound understanding of ground realities an acknowledgment that sometimes, rules must bend to uphold peace and coexistence", Singh says.

Singh released his memoir "Crime, Grime & Gumption: Case Files of an IPS Officer" last year and his latest book is set for an early release.

This year, too, Holi is a controversial day. Sambhal has been tense after riots broke out on 24 November last year following a survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid located in the town. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Why is there a surge in attacks in Pak's southwest?

Pakistan's neglected southwestern province of Balochistan has been the scene of a yearslong insurgency, with a dramatic uptick in attacks in recent years underscoring the struggles the government in Islamabad faces in dealing with myriad security threats.

However, the hijacking of a passenger train on Tuesday was the first time the outlawed Baloch Liberation Army, or BLA, carried out such a large-scale operation, taking hundreds of people aboard the train hostage and battling Pakistani security forces to a standoff on Wednesday.

Islamabad-based independent analyst Abdullah Khan told The Associated Press the train hijacking was the worst attack to date by the BLA — and predicted the country will be shocked when the final details surface, including the number of casualties, which he expects to be high.

At least 30 militants were killed in initial exchanges of gunfire around the Jaffer Express since the BLA attacked the train. By late Wednesday, security forces had rescued 190 of the 450 passengers who were initially on the train, according to officials.

Who are the separatists and what are they fighting for?

Balochistan is Pakistan's largest province and the country's least populated. It's also a hub for the country's ethnic Baloch minority, whose members say they face discrimination by the government.

The separatists have fought since the early 2000s for autonomy — if not outright independence — from Islamabad and for a greater share of natural resources that the undeveloped province abounds in, such as natural gas, oil and minerals.

Over the years, the BLA has grown in strength, prompting some analysts to say the group today compares to the Pakistani Taliban in terms of the threat it poses for the country.

The BLA has regularly targeted Pakistani security forces and has also in the past attacked civilians, including Chinese nationals working on multibillion-dollar projects related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

It has also staged attacks beyond Balochistan, including in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city. Although the government insists it has significantly curbed violence, attacks in Balochistan have not abated. Islamic militant groups also operate in the province.

Why now?

The BLA, which both Pakistan and the United States have designated a terrorist organisation, is estimated to have around 3,000 fighters, promptly claimed responsibility for the attack on Tuesday.

The group seeks to establish an independent Baloch state, encompassing territories in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan where the Baloch ethnic group lives.

The Pakistani government claims that there is a degree of cooperation between the BLA and the country's top militant group, the Pakistani Taliban.

Analysts say the BLA has grown more emboldened since the Pakistani Taliban ended a cease-fire with the government in November 2022, encouraging more militant attacks across the country.

What's the bigger picture?

Separately from the rivalry with India, Pakistan has also had a tense relationship with neighbouring Iran, contributing to the insecurity in Balochistan.

The two countries share a 900-kilometer border, which remains largely ungoverned, allowing smugglers and militant groups to move about freely. Both governments accuse each other of harbouring or tolerating insurgent groups.

Economic factors also drive the unrest, said Khan, the analyst, adding that it does not bode well for Pakistan's economy.

"Who will come and invest in Pakistan if we keep seeing such attacks," he said.

Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative has poured billions of dollars into Pakistan but it has also alienated the Baloch minority further. They say Islamabad is exploiting Balochistan's resources while neglecting the local communities.

However, Syed Muhammad Ali, a security analyst, said that while the train attack may have provided the BLA with "instant public and media attention," the likely civilian deaths from the attack will ultimately "weaken their support base". *—PTI*

The Baloch Liberation Army is a separatist militant group
PHOTO: X

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

They crossed the world to enter US, now they're stuck in Panama

They crossed oceans to get to the US, fleeing conflict, religious persecution, poverty and government crackdowns in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Cameroon, China, Pakistan and Iran.

After flying to Central and South America, they bused through countries where they didn't speak the language and walked through unfamiliar jungle to get to the US-Mexico border. Within days, they were detained and put on military aircraft that flew nearly 300 of them to Panama as US President Donald Trump sought to accelerate deportations.

Panama was supposed to be a stopover. But for those unwilling to return home — mostly out of well-founded fear — Panama sent them to a guarded camp without access to lawyers in the same Darien jungle many had crossed months earlier on their way north.

Over the past week, under legal pressure, the Panamanian government dropped them off at a bus station in the capital with 30 days to figure out where they will go next.

"I risked everything, my life, everything just to be sent back." said Isha Len, a 29-year-old from Cameroon. Here are the stories that some of them told The Associated Press:

Isha Len, 29, Cameroon

After conflict broke out in her small town, Len crossed Cameroon by car and minibus, then a fisherman friend carried her four hours by boat to Nigeria.

Len, a schoolteacher, flew to Sao Paulo, Brazil, where she said authorities detained her for a month in the airport. From there, she wound north through South America by bus, following other migrants until they reached the Darien Gap.

She walked days through the dangerous jungle that divides Colombia and Panama before boarding buses that carried her through Central America. After being kidnapped for days by a gang in Guatemala, she crossed into southern Mexico, where she took a boat along the Pacific coast. After she landed, she to Mexico City, continuing on by bus and car to Tijuana.

Artemis Ghasemzadeh, 27, Iran

Artemis Ghasemzadeh fled her country after converting from Islam to Christianity – something that could cost Ghasemzadeh her life in Iran. She flew to Dubai, where she stayed two weeks and then took a flight to South Korea. From there she flew to Mexico City, before going to Tijuana. She crossed the U.S. border on 9 February, and was detained.

"For changing your religion, your punishment is death," she said.

"We don't know what will happen."

Wang Qiu, 53, China

Wang Qiu said he left home after he was imprisoned for three years for speaking out about democracy and human rights issues.

He flew from Beijing to Cuba, then to Suriname, a small South American country. From there, he traveled by land: through Guyana, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, before trekking through the Darien Gap.

He moved up through Central America and Mexico before being detained after crossing to San Diego.

Qamar Abdi, 19, Somalia

Qamar Abdi, left for the US on 17 August, due to warfare between the government and militants of al-Shabab, which the US recognizes as a terrorist group.

She hopped from buses to shared cars for nearly a month until she reached South Africa. From there, she flew to Sao Paulo, Brazil, and spent the next six months riding buses north. When she arrived at the northern tip of Colombia, she travelled six days through the Darien Gap, landing in Panama on New Year's Day.

Many of the deportees were fleeing their home countries to the US for fear of persecution. With many of them unwilling to return home, many were set to a guarded camp in Panama
PHOTO: ANI

She took buses to the southern Mexican border city of Tapachula, where she was temporarily kidnapped and robbed by a gang.

To avoid immigration authorities, she traveled hours packed on a boat with other migrants along Mexico's Pacific coast, then took a bus to Mexico City. before driving to Tijuana, where she crossed into the US.

Samin Haider, 21, Pakistan

Samin Haider left for Dubai in 2023 after violence surged in his region of Parachinar, which borders Afghanistan and has been plagued for decades by conflicts between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims.

Haider was there for one and a half years before the United Arab Emirates cancelled visas for Pakistanis.

He then flew to Mexico and travelled to the US-Mexico border with the hopes of seeking asylum. Now deported, he still hopes to reach the US.

Hayatullah Omagh, 29, Afghanistan

Omagh fled Afghanistan in 2022 after the takeover of the Taliban because he identified as an atheist and was part of an ethnic minority.

He first went to Pakistan, where he got a visa for six months, and struggled to get a new one due to his Afghani passport. He then went to Iran and worked there for sometime, but the country wouldn't accept him as a refugee.

He managed to get a visa to Brazil, which offered a number of Afghan people refuge and flew to Sao Paulo in 2024.

Hoping to reunite with friends and family in the US, Omagh paid smugglers to move him north through Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia.

He trekked through the Darien Gap, then took buses north through Central America to southern Mexico.

Mexican authorities detained him and a few times before he managed to take a flight to Mexico City and later to the US.

"After so much time, I've lost hope," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Pak PM visits Balochistan after train hijack

KARACHI, 13 MARCH

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday visited the restive Balochistan province to review the law and order situation and to express solidarity with the people following the Jaffar Express hijacking incident in which 21 civilians and four soldiers were killed. Sharif's visit comes a day after security forces killed all 33 Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militants who on Tuesday hijacked the Jaffar Express. Sharif is accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Federal Minister for Planning, Development Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Nawabzada Magsi and others. —*PTI*

Pope marks 12 years of papacy despite health concerns

ROME, 13 MARCH

Pope Francis celebrated the 12th anniversary of his papacy on Thursday as he continues to receive medical treatment for double pneumonia. The Vatican reported a stable condition for the 88-year-old pontiff, who has shown improvement following a chest X-ray that confirmed progress in his recovery. Just days earlier, doctors stated he was no longer in imminent danger of death. While the Vatican has not announced how the anniversary will be commemorated, public masses are planned in his honour across Rome, despite no further medical bulletins being issued. —*PTI*

Taiwan warns of China's 'psychological war'

TAIPEI, 13 MARCH

Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te has called for enhanced measures to counter China's escalating infiltration, espionage, and psychological warfare efforts aimed at weakening the island's defences. Citing a spate of recent incidents, Lai emphasized the need to bolster legal safeguards to prevent and detect such activities. Beijing's tactics, which fall within a "gray area" short of open armed conflict, include attempts to subvert, obtain secrets, lure armed forces members, and influence public opinion to erode confidence in Taiwan's National defence. Lai's Democratic Progressive Party advocates for the Island's continued de facto independence from China. China has refused to engage with the DPP since Lai's predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, took office eight years ago. Beijing regularly deploys ships and planes into Taiwan's airspace and waters, aiming to intimidate the Island's 23 million inhabitants and wear down its armed forces. —*PTI*

SA to host inaugural G20 trade meeting

JOHANNESBURG, 13 MARCH

South Africa is set to host the inaugural G20 Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) meeting from 18 March, to 20 March, under its presidency. The virtual meeting will bring together senior officials from G20 member countries, the European Union, and the African Union. Ambassador Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter, deputy director-general of trade at the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, announced that this meeting is the first of four proposed TIWG meetings. The meetings will culminate in the G20 Trade Ministers' meeting, which South Africa will host in October. The meeting will focus on: trade and inclusive growth, responsive trade and investment agenda, G20 framework on green industrialisation and WTO reform. —*PTI*

Russia takes Kursk's biggest town from Ukraine

Putin visits region and says he expects it to be 'free' soon

MOSCOW, 13 MARCH

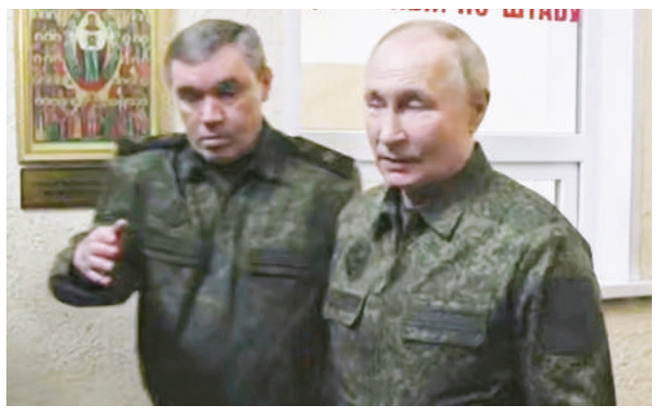
Russian Defence ministry claimed they have driven the Ukrainian army out of the biggest town in Russia's Kursk border region even as United States sought a response from Kremlin on the proposed 30-day ceasefire Ukraine has endorsed.

Unconfirmed reports say the Russian President Vladimir Putin visited his commanders in Kursk and said he expected the region to be 'completely free' even as Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment on the claim.

The renewed Russian military push and Putin's high-profile visit to his troops came as US President Donald Trump presses for a diplomatic end to the war. The US Tuesday lifted its March 3 suspension of military aid for Kyiv after senior US and Ukrainian officials made progress on how to stop the fighting during talks held in Saudi Arabia.

Even as US negotiators were on their way to Russia, Yuri Ushakov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy adviser, said in televised remarks that the US proposed temporary ceasefire would offer a "temporary break for the Ukrainian military."

Ushakov said that Moscow wants a "long-term peaceful settlement that takes into account Moscow's interests and concerns." He made the statement a day after having a phone call with White House national security adviser Mike Waltz.



Russian President Vladimir Putin accompanied by Russian Chief of General Staff General Valery Gerasimov visits military headquarters in the Kursk region of Russia. **PHOTO: PTI**

Trump said on Wednesday that "it's up to Russia now" as his administration presses Moscow to agree to the ceasefire. The US president has made veiled threats to hit Russia with new sanctions if it won't engage with peace efforts. Senior US officials say they hope to see Russia stop attacks on Ukraine within the next few days. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News that national security adviser Mike Waltz spoke Wednesday with his Russian counterpart. She also confirmed that Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, will head to Moscow for talks with Russian officials, possibly including Putin.

- Trump said on Wednesday that "it's up to Russia now" as his administration presses Moscow to agree to the ceasefire. The US president has made veiled threats to hit Russia with new sanctions if it won't engage with peace efforts.

By signaling its openness to a ceasefire, Ukraine has presented the Kremlin with a dilemma at a time when the Russian military has the upper hand in the war, whether to accept a truce and abandon hopes of making new gains, or reject the offer and risk derailing a cautious rapprochement with Washington. —*PTI*

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

ICC takes custody of former Philippines prez

THE HAGUE, 13 MARCH

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has taken custody of former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte following his arrest on Wednesday, in connection with a warrant accusing him of crimes against humanity linked to his controversial anti-drug campaign. Rights groups and victim families praised this significant development. ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan described it as "a crucial step" for justice.

Duterte, 79, was apprehended in Manila before being flown to The Hague. Upon arrival, medical assistance was provided as a precaution, though details regarding his health remain undisclosed. The former president is expected to appear before the court shortly to confirm his identity and review the charges against him.

The Philippines Embassy in The Hague provided assistance, including care packages, while crowds gathered outside the ICC detention centre. Families of victims expressed their relief, hoping this arrest brings justice for those affected by Duterte's crackdown, which is estimated to have resulted in thousands of deaths.

Duterte's supporters denounced his arrest, calling it illegal and highlighting political motivations behind his treatment, while others celebrated it as a landmark victory for accountability. The Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos defended the legality of the arrest amid ongoing tensions over Duterte's previous administration.

The ICC launched an investigation into Duterte's actions in 2021, examining mass killings during his tenure as president and former mayor of Davao. Prosecutors have found reasonable grounds to implicate him directly in murder.

Although the Philippines withdrew from the ICC in 2019, the court asserts that it retains jurisdiction over alleged crimes committed before this withdrawal. The upcoming legal proceedings may extend over months or even years as Duterte's legal team prepares to challenge the court's jurisdiction. —*PTI*

Canada, EU retaliate against Trump's tariffs

BRUSSELS, 13 MARCH

Major trading partners reacted swiftly to President Donald Trump's heightened tariffs on aluminium and steel imports by imposing significant tariffs on a range of US products, including textiles, water heaters, beef, and bourbon.

Canada, the largest supplier of steel and aluminium to the US, announced a reciprocal 25 per cent tariff on steel products and additional taxes on tools, computers, sports equipment, and cast-iron products.

The European Union (EU) also prepared to increase tariffs on American goods such as beef, poultry, bourbon, motorcycles, peanut butter, and jeans. The combined new tariffs are expected to cost businesses billions and escalate uncertainty between two of the world's largest trading partners. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned that prices will rise for consumers and jobs are at risk. "Tariffs are taxes. They are bad for business, and even worse for consumers," she stated. The EU's targeted approach aims to impact products from Republican-held states while minimising damage to the economies of member countries. Chris Swonger, head of the Distilled Spirits Council, expressed disappointment, stating the EU's decision would undermine efforts to rebuild US spirits exports.

Canada announced a reciprocal 25 per cent tariff on steel products and additional taxes on tools, computers and sports equipment **PHOTO: PTI**

Von der Leyen indicated that the EU remains open to negotiations. Canada's incoming Prime Minister Mark Carney expressed his willingness to meet with Trump to discuss trade on a mutual basis.

As of 1 April, the EU will reimpose tariffs suspended under the Biden administration before introducing additional duties targeting US exports worth €18 billion (USD 19.6 billion) on April 13. The EU may face losses of up to 3.7 million tons of steel exports, according to the European steel association, Eurofer. —*PTI*

Ireland cheats US: Trump

WASHINGTON, 13 MARCH

President Donald Trump welcomed Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin to the White House on Wednesday for the annual St Patrick's Day celebration, where he reiterated his claims that several nations, including Ireland, are taking advantage of the United States. In response, Martin highlighted Ireland's contributions to the US economy.

This marked Trump's first Oval Office meeting with a foreign leader following his recent contentious discussion with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy over the ongoing conflict with Russia, which ended abruptly.

During their meeting, Trump acknowledged the concentration of US pharmaceutical companies in Ireland, attributing it to the country's tax policies and criticising past US leadership. Martin countered that the trade relationship is mutual, pointing out that Ireland's two largest airlines purchase more aircraft from Boeing than any other country outside the US. —*PTI*

President Donald Trump with Ireland's PM Michel Martin **PHOTO: PTI**

Carney to take oath as Canada's PM on Friday

OTTAWA, 13 MARCH

Mark Carney, who was recently elected as the leader of the Liberal Party, will take oath as Canada's 24th Prime Minister along with his cabinet on Friday, CTV News reported.

He will be taking the reins from Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau after securing a win in the Liberal leadership on the first ballot held on Sunday.

Carney will be assuming office at a time when polling shows the Conservatives and Liberals neck-in-neck, amid Canadians' rising concerns over ties between Canada and the US.

On his first day as Liberal leader, Carney met Trudeau at the Prime Minister's Office to discuss about how long of a transition period would be needed. By the end of the day, Carney stated the changeover would be "seamless" and "quick," according to the CTV News report.

Trudeau would visit the governor general on Friday and officially tender his resignation. Then, Carney would take oaths of office and allegiance. Canada's new PM would unveil his new ministry, which comprises all his cabinet picks.

Many of the main players who hold portfolios central to managing US President Donald Trump's tariffs backed Carney during the leadership race, CTV News reported. ANI —*ANI*

Columbia student's detention to stretch as lawyers spar

NEW YORK, 13 MARCH

Mahmoud Khalil will remain detained in Louisiana until at least next week but can finally speak to lawyers while they fight the Trump administration's plans to deport the Columbia University graduate student for his role in campus protests against Israel, a judge decided at a hearing Wednesday.

The brief hearing, which focused on thorny jurisdictional issues, drew hundreds of demonstrators to the federal courthouse in lower Manhattan to denounce the arrest of Khalil, a permanent US resident who is married to an American citizen.

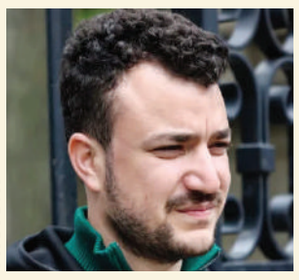


PHOTO: X

Judge Jesse M. Furman ordered Monday that the 30-year-old not be deported while the court considers a legal challenge brought by his lawyers, who want Khalil returned to New York and released under supervision. For now Furman is letting Khalil remain in Louisiana. —*PTI*

'No one will be expelled from Gaza'

WASHINGTON, 13 MARCH

Amid row over his 'Gaza Plan', US President Donald Trump asserted that no one would be "expelled" from the strip, The Jerusalem Post reported.

He made the remarks before his meeting with Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin at the White House on Wednesday. Trump said, "No one is expelling anyone from Gaza."

During his meeting with Martin, he even called the US Senate's minority leader Chuck Schumer "a Palestinian".

Trump said, "Schumer is a Palestinian as far as I'm concerned. He's become a Palestinian. He used to be Jewish. He's not Jewish anymore. He's a Palestinian."

He made a similar statement regarding Schumer on his social media platform Truth Social in February. —*PTI*

SUNITA STUCK IN SPACE

SpaceX flight to rescue NASA's astronauts delayed again

CAPE CANAVERAL, 13 MARCH

A launch pad problem prompted SpaceX to delay a flight to the International Space Station to replace NASA's two stuck astronauts - Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams on Wednesday. Officials said the launch was off until at least Friday.

The new crew must get to the International Space Station before the two can head home after nine months in orbit.

Concerns over a critical hydraulic system arose less than four hours before the Falcon rocket's planned evening liftoff from NASA's Kennedy Space Center. As the countdown clocks ticked down, engineers evaluated the hydraulics used to release one of the two arms clamping the rocket to its support structure. This structure needs to tilt back right before liftoff.

Already strapped into their capsule, the four astronauts awaited a final decision, which came down with less than an hour remaining in the countdown. SpaceX canceled for the day. Once at the space station, the US, Japanese and Russian crew will replace Wilmore and Williams, who have been up there since June. The two test pilots had to move into the space station for an extended stay after Boeing's new Starliner capsule encountered major breakdowns in transit.

The new crew must get to the International Space Station before the two can head home after nine months in orbit. **PHOTO: PTI**

Starliner's debut crew flight was supposed to last just a week, but NASA ordered the capsule to return empty and transferred Wilmore and Williams to SpaceX for the return leg. —*PTI*

Suspect named in missing Indian student case

NEW YORK, 13 MARCH

US authorities have identified a 24-year-old man as a person of interest in the case of Sudiksha Konanki, a 20-year-old Indian student who has been missing since March 6 during a spring break trip to the Dominican Republic.

Konanki, a permanent resident of the US, was last seen at the Riu Republic Resort in Punta Cana. She was on holiday with five female friends when she disappeared. The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office reported that Joshua Riibe was seen with Konanki at the resort prior to her disappearance. However, authorities clarified that this is not a criminal investigation, and he is not a suspect.

Quinn, a spokesperson for the Sheriff's Office, stated that while Riibe may have been the last person to see her, the investigation is ongoing and no conclusions should be drawn. Surveillance footage showed Konanki remaining on the beach with a man while her friends left. —*PTI*

Syria signs Constitution allowing Islamist rule

DAMASCUS, 13 MARCH

Syria's interim president on Thursday signed a temporary Constitution that leaves the country under Islamist rule for five years during a transitional phase.

The country's interim rulers have struggled to exert their authority across much of the country since the Islamist former insurgent group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, led a lightning insurgency that overthrew former leader Bashar Assad in December.

Former HTS leader Ahmad Al-Sharaa is now the country's interim president — a decision that was announced after a meeting of the armed groups that took part in the offensive against Assad.

Abdulhamid Al-Awak, one of the seven members of the committee tasked to draft the temporary constitution, said that it will maintain some provisions from the previous one, including the stipulation that the head of state has to be a Muslim, and Islamic law is the main source of jurisprudence.

- A key goal of the interim Constitution was to give a timeline for the country's political transition. In December, Al-Sharaa said it could take up to three years to rewrite.

A key goal of the interim constitution was to give a timeline for the country's political transition. In December, Al-Sharaa said it could take up to three years to rewrite Syria's constitution and up to five years to organise and hold elections.

While many were happy to see an end to the Assad family's dictatorial rule of over 50 years in the war-torn country, religious and ethnic minorities have been sceptical of the new Islamist leaders and reluctant to allow Damascus to assert control of their areas. —*PTI*

PHOTO:FREEPIK

Rupee surges 22 paise to settle at 87 against USD

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

The rupee surged 27 paise to settle at 87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday following robust macroeconomic data and easing crude oil prices. Besides, recent weakness in the US dollar index also supported the local currency, forex dealers said. However, losses in domestic equities and unabated foreign capital outflows capped the sharp gain, they added. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.13 and hit the intraday high of 86.94 against the greenback. The unit touched the day's low of 87.15 before ending the session at 87 (provisional), 22 paise higher from its previous closing level.In the previous session on Wednesday, the rupee settled 1 paisa lower at 87.22 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

Gold reclaims all-time high level of ₹89,450/10g

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

Gold prices climbed by Rs 600 to revisit the all-time high of Rs 89,450 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a firm global trend, according to local marketmen. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 88,850 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity advanced by Rs 600 to reclaim its all-time high level of Rs 89,050 per 10 grams. It had settled at Rs 88,450 per 10 grams. On 20 February, the yellow metal of 99.9 and 99.5 per cent purity inched up by Rs 50 to hit an all-time high of Rs 89,450 and Rs 89,050 per 10 grams. Silver prices also rallied by Rs 1,000 to hit nearly a five-month high of Rs 1,01,200 per kg. The white metal had finished at Rs 1,00,200 per kg in the previous market close. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange, gold contracts for April delivery rallied by Rs 210 or 0.24 per cent to hit a record high of Rs 86,896 per 10 grams in the evening session.*—PTI*

Indus appstore to replace GetApps on Xiaomi phones

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

PhonePe's app marketplace Indus Appstore on Thursday announced a multi-year partnership with consumer electronics maker Xiaomi India. Indus Appstore will now come pre-installed on all new Xiaomi smartphones in India, and will also replace GetApps on existing devices, aiming to enhance user experience, simplify app discovery, and increase accessibility, according to a company statement. "By combining Xiaomi India's reach with our localised app discovery platform, we're creating opportunities for developers while delivering a seamless, culturally-relevant experience to users. *—PTI*

Ola Electric offers discounts of ₹26K on S1 e-scooters

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Ola Electric on Thursday announced limited-time Holi flash sale offers for its S1 range of electric scooters. Under this sale, customers can avail discounts of up to Rs 26,750 on S1 Air and Rs 22,000 on S1 X+ (Gen 2), with the models now starting at Rs 89,999, and Rs 82,999, respectively, the company said in a statement. The flash sale began on 13 March and ends on 17 March. The company is also offering discounts of up to Rs 25,000 on the rest of its S1 range, including all the scooters from its latest S1 Gen 3 range, it added. With both S1 Gen 2 and Gen 3, the company has a portfolio of scooters across all price points ranging from Rs 69,999 to Rs 1,79,999 (after festive discount).*—PTI*

India to be top consumer market: Morgan Stanley

GDP growth is projected at 6.3% for FY2025, 6.5% for FY2026

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

A recent report from Morgan Stanley indicates that India is set to become a highly desirable consumer market, bolstered by a significant energy transition, an increasing credit-to-GDP ratio, and a growing manufacturing sector.

The report highlights that India is capturing a larger share of global output, attributed to strong foundational elements including robust population growth, a functioning democracy, macroeconomic stability, improved infrastructure, a burgeoning entrepreneurial class, and enhanced social outcomes.

Morgan Stanley anticipates a recovery in India's economic growth after a slowdown in the latter half of 2024, projecting GDP growth of 6.3 per cent for FY2025 and 6.5 per cent for FY2026. This growth is expected to be driven by supportive fiscal and monetary policies, alongside a resurgence in service exports.

Inflation is predicted to remain stable PHOTO: X

While the report underscores that macroeconomic stability should be maintained within a comfortable range, it does caution about potential external risks, such as global trade policies, US interest rate changes, and geopolitical tensions.

In terms of the stock market, Morgan Stanley believes the outlook remains promising, noting that equity markets are currently undervalued despite strong fundamentals. The firm sees earnings growth accelerating, particularly in the financial, consumer discretionary, industrial, and technology sectors.

On the monetary policy front, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has maintained an accommodative stance, with expectations of a further rate cut in April to bolster economic growth. The Indian government is also focused on increasing consumption through income tax cuts and enhanced capital expenditure while exercising fiscal discipline.

- In terms of the stock market, Morgan Stanley believes the outlook remains promising, noting that equity markets are currently undervalued despite strong fundamentals

The report highlights the critical role of domestic demand in driving economic growth, with consumption expected to recover, aided by rising urban demand due to tax incentives. Inflation is predicted to remain stable, with headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation projected to decline to 4.3 per cent by FY2026-27. *—ANI*

Temasek buys 10% stake in Haldiram at $10B valuation

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Temasek, Singapore's sovereign investment firm, is set to acquire a minority 10 per cent stake in Haldiram Snacks Food, India's largest packed snacks and sweets company, at a valuation of USD 10 billion, according to industry sources.

The firm signed a definitive term sheet agreement earlier this week, marking the largest valuation in the Indian packed food industry. The Agarwal family, the promoters of Haldiram Snacks Food, is reportedly considering bringing in another investor to sell a further stake, as the company raked in revenues exceeding Rs 12,500 crore in FY24.

This agreement with Temasek follows months of negotiations, with several private equity firms, including Blackstone, Alpha Wave Global, and Bain Capital-led consortiums, vying for a stake in Haldiram Snacks Food. The Agarwal family may also pursue an Initial Public Offering (IPO) next year to capitalise on the robust Indian stock market.

Initially, the promoters aimed to divest a larger portion of the company but have now opted to sell only a minority stake. This capital injection is expected to bolster Haldiram Snacks Food's expansion plans, both domestically and in select foreign markets.

Haldiram Snacks Food is the amalgamation of two factions of the Haldiram family – Delhi and Nagpur. The National Company Law Tribunal has approved the merger process between these factions, with other regulatory approvals still pending.

Established in 1937 as a retail sweets and namkeen shop in Bikaner, Rajasthan, by Ganga Bhishen Agarwal, Haldiram products now reach over 80 countries worldwide. *—PTI*

Zomato, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank are the laggards PHOTO: X

Sensex falls on selling in realty & auto shares

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Benchmark BSE Sensex reversed its early gains to close lower by 200 points on Thursday, marking its fifth straight session of losses due to selling in realty, IT and auto counters.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 200.85 points or 0.27 per cent to close at 73,828.91 with 22 of its constituents ending lower and eight with gains. The index opened higher and hit a high of 74,401.11 in the late morning session.

However, it failed to hold onto gains due to persistent selling in select bluechips and shed 259.17 points or 0.35 per cent to hit a low of 73,770.59 later.

The NSE Nifty fell 73.30 points or 0.33 per cent to settle at 22,397.20. In the session, the benchmark declined by 93.15 points or 0.41 per cent to hit an intraday low of 22,377.35.

Zomato, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance, Maruti Suzuki India, Adani Ports, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv, UltraTech Cement and Infosys were the major losers among Sensex shares.

In contrast, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel, NTPC, Tata Consultancy Services, PowerGrid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Sun Pharmaceuticals were the gainers.In broader markets, the BSE smallcap gauge fell 0.62 per cent, while midcap index declined 0.77 per cent.

Shares of PB Fintech, parent entity of Policybazaar, extended the losses for second straight session, by declining more than 5 per cent to close at Rs 1,327.80, a day after the company proposed to infuse Rs 696 crore in its healthcare arm, a move that failed to cheer investors. *—PTI*

Domestic vehicle dispatches rise 2% in Feb

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) reported that domestic passenger vehicle dispatches from factories to dealers increased by 1.9 per cent year-on-year to 377,689 units in February. This marks the highest sales figure for the month since records began, with total wholesales reaching 370,786 units in February 2024.

"Despite a slowing demand, the passenger vehicle segment exhibited resilience, achieving its best-ever February sales of 378,000 units, reflecting a 1.9 per cent growth compared to February 2024," SIAM Director General Rajesh Menon stated.

This marks the highest sales figure for the month since records began, with total wholesales reaching 370,786 units in February 2024 PHOTO: X

In contrast, two-wheeler dispatches experienced a significant downturn, falling by 9 per cent year-on-year to 1,384,605 units last month. Scooter sales dipped slightly to 512,783 units from 515,340 units in the previous year. Motorcycle dispatches plummeted by 13 per cent to 838,250 units compared to 964,362 units in February last year. Moped sales also saw an 18 per cent decline to 33,572 units.

Conversely, three-wheeler dispatches to dealers rose by 5 per cent year-on-year to 57,788 units.

This increase included a rise in passenger carrier sales to 46,111 units from 43,173 units the previous year, while goods carrier dispatches grew by 6 per cent to 10,603 units. However, e-rickshaw sales dropped dramatically, down 51 per cent to just 741 units in February.

Menon expressed optimism, noting that Holi and Ugadi in March are expected to boost demand, potentially closing the fiscal year 2024-25 on a positive note. *—PTI*

India proposes anti-dumping duty on vitamin imports

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The commerce ministry's investigation arm Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) has recommended anti-dumping duty of up to USD 20.87 per kilogram on import of a certain kind of vitamin, used for animal consumption, from China, the European Union and Switzerland for five years.

The DGTR in its findings has concluded that imports of 'Vitamin A Palmitate' have significantly increased in absolute terms.

Due to the dumping, the performance of domestic industry in terms of profit, cash profits and ROCE (Return on Capital Employed) has been adversely affected.

PHOTO:X

"The authority recommends imposition of anti-dumping duty on the imports...for a period of five years," it said. The recommended duty ranges between USD 0.87-20.87 per kg.The finance ministry will take the final decision to impose the duty.

Piramal Pharma Ltd had filed a petition before the DGTR for imposition of the duty on the imports.

Anti-dumping probes are conducted by countries to determine whether domestic industries have been hurt because of a surge in cheap imports.

As a counter measure, they impose these duties under the multilateral regime of the Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO). The duty is aimed at ensuring fair trading practices and creating a level-playing field for domestic producers vis-a-vis foreign producers and exporters. *—PTI*

Puma to cut 500 jobs worldwide

MUNICH, 13 MARCH

Puma announced on Wednesday announce that that it will be cutting 500 jobs worldwide as well as close some unprofitable stores due to uncertain US consumer demand.

This comes right after Puma recorded a disappointing quarterly and annual forecasts a day before, resulting in its shares slumping 23per cent.

CEO Arne Freundt had said that Puma's target consumers in the US were not spending due to economic uncertainty.

The grim outlook came after weak quarterly sales and annual profit announced in January, which caused concerns regarding Puma's ability to compete with bigger rivals like Adidas and Nike, along with new and fast-growing brands like On Running and Hoka, according to the report.

Puma also confirmed that Chinese production made up about 10 per cent of shoe imports into the United States, which are now subject to the new tariffs by US President Donald Trump. *—Agencies*

'GenAI could increase banking ops' productivity'

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Generative AI (GenAI) is poised to improve productivity levels of Indian financial services by 34 to 38 per cent by 2030 and up to 46 per cent, specifically for banking operations, said an EY report.

The report titled 'How much productivity can GenAI unlock in India? The AIdea of India: 2025' emphasised that GenAI) is reshaping India's financial services landscape, driving significant advancements in customer engagement, operational efficiency, and risk assessment.

It said the survey canvassed more than 125 C-suite executives across India. They represent diverse sectors, including financial services, retail, healthcare, life sciences, media and entertainment, technology, automotive, industrials and energy.

According to the study, 74 per cent of financial firms have initiated proof-of-concept projects, and 11 per cent have moved to production-level deployments.

"Investment in GenAI is also increasing, with 42 per cent of organisations actively allocating budgets toward AI initiatives. They are rapidly adopting GenAI across key areas such as voice bots, email automation, business intelligence, and workflow automation," the report said.

Customer service is the top priority, with 68 per cent of firms prioritising it for GenAI implementation, followed by operations (47 per cent), underwriting (32 per cent), sales (26 per cent), and IT (21 per cent).

These investments are already delivering measurable results: 63 per cent have seen improved customer satisfaction levels, while 58 per cent of firms report cost reductions, the study said. *—PTI*

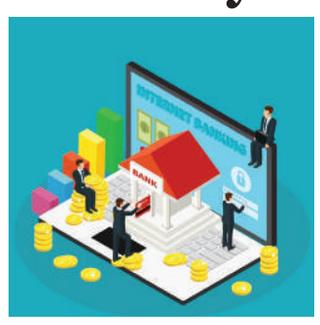


PHOTO:FREEPIK

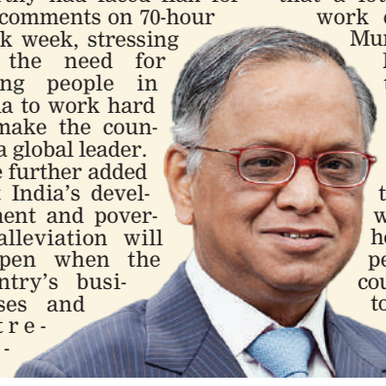
Treat employees as humans: Narayana Murthy to firms

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

Infosys founder NR Narayana Murthy said that businesses and entrepreneurs need to treat employees as humans, reduce the pay gap between lowest and highest salaries, by embracing "compassionate capitalism." In December 2024, Murthy had faced flak for his comments on 70-hour work week, stressing on the need for young people in India to work hard to make the country a global leader.

He further added that India's development and poverty alleviation will happen when the country's businesses and entrepreneurs compassionately embrace capitalism.

"Capitalism is all about providing opportunity for people to come out with new ideas to create wealth for themselves and their investors; to create jobs for people and thereby reduce poverty; and to contribute to taxes in the country so that a lot of public good work can take place," Murthy explained.



Murthy stressed the role of entrepreneurs as "evangelists" of capitalism, emphasizing that their conduct would determine how the concept is perceived in a country long accustomed to socialism. *—Agencies*

FACE WAGE DISPARITIES

Only 1 in 5 blue-collar workers are women

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

A recent survey by job matching platform Indeed has highlighted that women occupy just one in five jobs within India's blue-collar workforce, facing significant challenges including wage disparities and inadequate sanitation.

The survey, which involved over 4,000 employers and employees across 14 industries in tier 1 and 2 cities, revealed that while 73 per cent of employers intended to hire women for blue-collar roles in 2024, female participation remained unchanged at 20 per cent nationwide. Blue-collar jobs are primarily defined as those involving manual or physical work.

Industries such as retail, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, construction, and travel and hospitality show a higher average female participation rate of 30 per cent. However, sectors like telecommunications, BFSI (Banking, Financial Services and Insurance), and IT/ITeS have representation below 10 per cent. The report noted that many women are seeking blue-collar jobs for financial independence, yet they are confronted with challenges. Over half of the surveyed women indicated that a lack of flexible shifts was a significant barrier, as strict shift timings complicate work-life balance. A notable wage gap persists, with 42 per cent of women believing they are underpaid relative to their male colleagues. Moreover, they encounter fewer promotion opportunities, exacerbating the gender pay gap.

The survey involved over 4,000 employers and employees across 14 industries in tier 1 and 2 cities PHOTO:X

Despite these obstacles, 78 per cent of employers plan to increase female hires in 2025, a 5 per cent rise from the previous year.

However, challenges such as a limited talent pool and high attrition rates remain."True progress requires better retention strategies and opportunities for career growth," said Sashi Kumar, Head of Sales at Indeed India, emphasizing that increasing women's participation is vital for economic development. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Former cricketer Stuart MacGill guilty over cocaine deal

SYDNEY, 13 MARCH

Former Australian spinner Stuart MacGill was found guilty of involvement in a cocaine deal on Thursday but cleared of participating in large-scale drug supply. A Sydney District Court jury acquitted the 54-year-old leg-spinner of facilitating a one-kg cocaine deal worth AUD 330,000 in April 2021. However, he was convicted of the charge of taking part in drug supply. MacGill, who played 44 Tests for Australia, "showed little emotion" as the verdict was read, according to a report in Australian media. Hearing of his sentence was adjourned for eight weeks. The court heard that MacGill introduced his regular drug dealer to his brother-in-law, Marino Sotiropoulos, at a meeting under his restaurant on Sydney's north shore.—*PTI*

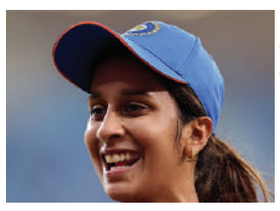


PHOTO: X

We're ready for WPL final: DC vice-captain

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Delhi Capitals vice-captain Jemimah Rodrigues emphasised that the long gap between the last league match and the Women's Premier League final has revitalised the team, and said it will work to her side's "advantage" in the title clash. The Capitals have qualified for their third straight WPL final after the Mumbai Indians were defeated by the Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the last league match in Mumbai on 11 March. The Capitals had finished their league engagements on 7 March with a defeat against the Gujarat Giants. Hence, they had to wait until the match between RCB and MI to decide the group leaders. "It's (the gap) working for our team. We've had a lot of team bonding sessions, and at the same time, this WPL was a bit hectic for us.—*PTI*

NRAI names 36-member team for JW Cup in May

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Paris Olympian Raiza Dhillon is part of a strong 36-member Indian junior squad announced by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) for the upcoming ISSF Junior World Cup scheduled in Suhl, Germany, from May 19 to 27.The squad will participate in 15 events, including three mixed team events. Dhillon will be part of the 12-member shotgun squad, while two standout performers from the Junior World Championships in Peru, Mukesh Nelavali, who won five golds and two bronze medals, and Divanshi, who clinched a double gold including a victory in the women's 25m pistol individual event, will return, aiming to replicate their success.—*PTI*

Babar opts out of National T20 Championship

KARACHI, 13 MARCH

Dropped from the Pakistan T20 squad for the series in New Zealand, former Pakistan captain Babar Azam has decided to skip the National T20 Championship. Babar, Rizwan, and fast bowler Naseem Shah were all dropped for the five-match T20 series starting March 16 in Christchurch but have been retained for the three ODIs against New Zealand. While announcing the team, PCB had indicated that Babar, Rizwan, and Naseem, who are all centrally contracted players, would be taking part in the National T20 in Faisalabad—*PTI*

Satwik-Chirag pair enters All England second round

Malvika Bansod loses in straight games to Akane of Japan

BIRMINGHAM, 13 MARCH

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the second round of the men's doubles competition at the All England Championships, registering a straight-game victory over Denmark's Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard.

Returning to the court after his father's loss last month, Satwik, along with his doubles partner Chirag, put on an impressive display, securing a 21-17, 21-15 win in just 40 minutes late Wednesday.

Moments after sealing the victory, Satwik raised his finger to the sky, his gaze fixed skyward, perhaps reaching out to his father, searching for him in the beyond.

"It's tough, but that's how life is," said Satwik. "It wasn't expected." The 24-year-old from Amalapuram expressed his gratitude to his partner for being there during this challenging time. He was there during my injury; his parents came down, and our coach also came down to my home town. "My father always wanted to bring them there." Reflecting on the sudden turn of events in the past fortnight,

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty
PHOTO: PTI

Chirag said: "Credit to Satwik, what he's gone through and how he's come back and decided to play here, nobody could do that. The duo, seeded 7th, will next take on China's Hao Nan Xie and Wei Han Zeng in the round of 16 on Thursday.

Malvika had earlier stunned Singapore's Yeo Jia Min in her debut match at the prestigious tournament.

World No. 9 Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who reached back-to-back semifinals at this event, will meet the eighth-seeded Korean pair of Hye Jeong Kim and Hee Yong Kong.

Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde will square off against the fifth-seeded Chinese duo of Yan Zhe Feng and Ya Xin Wei.

Lakshya stuns Christie to enter quarters, Malvika loses to Yamaguchi

India's Lakshya Sen stunned world no. 2 Jonatan Christie of Indonesia in straight games in a superlative display to enter the men's singles quarterfinals of the All England Championships here on Thursday.

Lakshya just took 36 minutes to beat Christie 21-13 21-10 in a one-sided contest. The win reduced Lakshay's head-to-head record against Christie to 3-4. This was the first time Lakshya played Christie, seeded third in this event, after the Paris Olympics.

Lakshya dominated Christie from the word go in a fluent show of skills.

The Indian used his energy and superb court coverage to fox the Indonesian and raced to a narrow 11-7 lead at the break in the first game.

But after the break, Christie tried to forge his way back into the contest, latching on Lakshya's unforced errors to bring it level to 12-12.

Even as Lakshya stormed into the quarterfinals, India's women's singles campaign ended with Malvika Bansod losing in straight games against two-time world champion Akane Yamaguchi of Japan in the pre-quarterfinals. —*PTI*

WORLD PARA ATHLETICS GRAND PRIX

PHOTO: PTI

India dominates medal tally

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

As the final day of competition approaches, India continues to assert its dominance at the World Para Athletics Grand Prix, leading the medal tally with an astounding haul of 95 medals 33 gold, 29 silver, and 33 bronze.

India are followed by the Neutral Para Athletes contingent, who stand at a distant second with a total of 26 medals (13 gold, 9 silver, and four bronze) while Uzbekistan rounds off the top three with a balanced tally of four golds, four silvers, and four bronze medals. The Indian contingent remains poised for an even stronger finish. Among the athletes set to compete is Preeti Pal, who has already secured a silver medal at the Grand Prix and will now be competing in the 200m T38 event. Preeti, known for her consistent performances in sprint events, will be aiming to add another medal to her name.

Ravi Rangoli will be participating in the Shot Put F41 category, carrying forward the momentum after impressive performances at previous national championships, where he has consistently remained among the top throwers in his category.

Ankur Dhama, one of India's most experienced para-athletes and an Arjuna Awardee, will take part in the 5000m T12 race. He has represented India at multiple Paralympic Games and is a known force in long-distance events. —*PTI*

INDIAN WELLS

Alcaraz beats Dimitrov to set up quarterfinal

INDIAN WELLS, 13 MARCH

Two-time defending champion Carlos Alcaraz overpowered Grigor Dimitrov 6-1, 6-1 on Wednesday to reach the quarterfinals of the ATP Indian Wells Masters.

The world number three from Spain defied the difficult windy conditions on Stadium Court to deliver a dominant performance against a player who had won their past two encounters.

He denied Dimitrov's bid to join Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime as the only player to beat Alcaraz in three consecutive meetings.

With his 50th ATP Masters 1000 match win, Alcaraz kept alive his bid to join Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic as the only men to win three straight Indian Wells titles.

Coco Gauff Suffers Heartbreaking Defeat

Coco Gauff continues her difficult start to the season after a fourth-round exit from Indian Wells. Following an unexpected fourth-round exit at the competition, Gauff is approaching a tough stretch of her season. The World No.3, who had ended the season with the WTA Finals title, found maintaining momentum difficult and showed no progression. —*PTI*

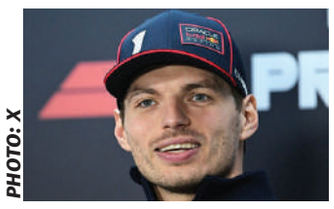


PHOTO: X

Verstappen joining Mercedes not on radar: Wolff

MELBOURNE, 13 MARCH

Mercedes Formula 1 boss Toto Wolff says a pitch to sign Max Verstappen for 2026 is "not on any radar".

Mercedes team principal and chief executive Toto Wolff has denied rumors on the eve of the Australian Grand Prix weekend that he's still seeking to sign reigning F1 world champion Max Verstappen for 2026.

Mercedes, which has a new driver lineup this year that sees rookie prospect Andrea Kimi Antonelli join George Russell, is hoping to emerge from its recent lean spell in F1 that has seen it score just five wins from the last three seasons, four of which came in 2024.

But while Verstappen was reportedly on Mercedes' shopping list last year as a top-gun replacement for its then-outgoing star Lewis Hamilton, Silver Arrows' team boss Wolff says extending Russell's contract beyond 2025 is the priority. —*PTI*

BCCI mourns Syed Abid Ali's death

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The BCCI on Thursday condoled the death of former India all-rounder Syed Abid Ali, saying he "embodied the spirit of the game" and his contribution to Indian cricket will always be remembered. Ali, who was known for his versatility and sharp fielding skills, died on Wednesday after a prolonged illness.

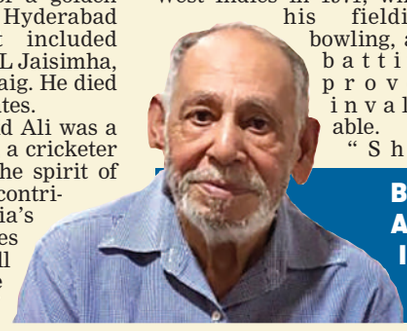
He was part of a golden generation of Hyderabad cricketers that included MAK Pataudi, ML Jaisimha, and Abbas Ali Baig. He died in the United States.

"Shri Syed Abid Ali was a true all-rounder, a cricketer who embodied the spirit of the game. His contributions to India's historic victories in the 1970s will always be remembered," said BCCI president Roger Binny in a statement.

"His dedication and versatility made him stand out. My deepest condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time."

Ali represented India in 29 Tests and 5 ODIs, leaving a mark with his all-round capabilities. His contributions were instrumental in India's historic Test series victories in England and the West Indies in 1971, where his fielding, bowling, and batting proved invaluable.

"Shri Syed Abid Ali played a key role in India's historic Test series victories in England and the West Indies in 1971. His fielding, bowling, and batting proved invaluable. My deepest condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia stated. —*PTI*



BETWEEN 1967 AND 1974, SYED ABID ALI PLAYED 29 TESTS FOR INDIA, TALLYING 1,018 RUNS AND TAKING 47 WICKETS

"I think my friend Abid Ali was a grossly underestimated cricketer

-Former India keeper-batter Farokh Engineer

Syed Abid Ali's all-round skills and his contribution to Indian cricket are quite valued. He was a true gentleman of the game. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and loved ones," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia stated. —*PTI*

Inoue vs Cardenas: Japan star to defend title in Las Vegas

SINGAPORE, 13 MARCH

Japan's unbeaten Naoya Inoue will fight in Las Vegas for the first time in four years when he takes on American Ramon Cardenas in May, promoters Top Rank said Thursday.

The 31-year-old "Monster" will defend his undisputed super-bantamweight world titles in his first fight outside of Japan since 2021.

Inoue's last bout was a fourth-round knockout of South Korea's Kim Ye-joon in Tokyo in January, which saw the Japanese fighter take his record to 29-0 with 26 KOs.

The 29-year-old Cardenas has a 26-1 record, winning 14 by KO.

His most recent fight was a unanimous decision win over Mexico's Bryan Acosta last month.

Inoue has fought eight times in Japan since his last overseas bout, a KO win over Michael Dasmarinas in Las Vegas in June 2021.

He is also expected to fight in Saudi Arabia later this year after signing a sponsorship deal with Riyadh Season.

Inoue said he was mentally "exhausted" after beating Kim in a fight that had to be reorganised twice. —*PTI*

Japan's unbeaten Naoya Inoue
PHOTO: X

ROHIT HAS NO REASON TO RETIRE: AB DE VILLIERS

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Rohit Sharma has no reason to retire, says South African batting great AB de Villiers, who believes the India skipper could go down as one of the greatest ODI captains of all time.

Speculations were rife about Rohit's retirement from ODIs after the Champions Trophy, but the 37-year-old put them to rest after leading India to an unprecedented third title.

"Compared to other captains, look at Rohit's win percentage; it's almost 74 per cent, which is substantially more than any other captain of the past," de Villiers said in his YouTube channel.

"If he keeps going, he will go down as one of the best ODI captains of all time. Rohit has also said he is not retiring and has requested that rumours be stopped spreading." —*PTI*

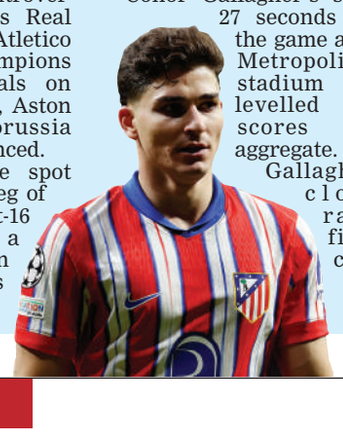
Real reach Champions League QFs

LONDON, 13 MARCH

Julian Alvarez's penalty in the shootout was controversially disallowed as Real Madrid beat rivals Atletico to reach the Champions League quarter-finals on Wednesday. Arsenal, Aston Villa, and Borussia Dortmund also advanced.

Failures from the spot defined the second leg of the Madrid derby last-16 tie, including a remarkable decision to rule out Alvarez's kick for Atletico. Real won 4-2 on penalties after a 2-2 draw on aggregate.

Conor Gallagher's strike 27 seconds into the game at the Metropolitano stadium had levelled the scores on aggregate.



Gallagher's close-range finish cancelled out Real's 2-1 lead from the first leg last week, but the reigning champions could have progressed inside 90 minutes.

They won a spot-kick midway through the second half when Kylian Mbappe was hauled down by Clement Lenglet after accelerating into the box.

However, Vinicius Junior blazed his kick high over the bar, and the game went to extra time and then penalties with no further scoring. —*PTI*

JioHotstar breaks viewership record

DUBAI, 13 MARCH

JioHotstar set new benchmarks in the digital streaming space as the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 wrapped up with an electrifying final.

The tournament delivered a record-breaking live sports experience across India, with over 540 crore total views, nearly 11,000 crore minutes of cumulative watch time, and a peak concurrency of 6.12 crores. A significant portion of the viewership came from Hindi-speaking regions —*PTI*

AGE-FRAUD IN SPORT

Amnesty, FIR, ban draft bill to counter age fraud in India

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

A one-time amnesty scheme for age-cheaters, FIRs for second age-fraud incident, a secure whistleblower platform to report such violations, compliance officers in every state, and ID cards with QR codes that act as age proof: these are some of the features listed in the draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) 2025 to take on this particular menace in Indian sports.

Age fraud has been one of the biggest problems facing Indian sports for a long time. The Draft NCAAFS 2025 was made public by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports on Wednesday in a bid to invite comments and suggestions from the general public and stakeholders till 31 March.

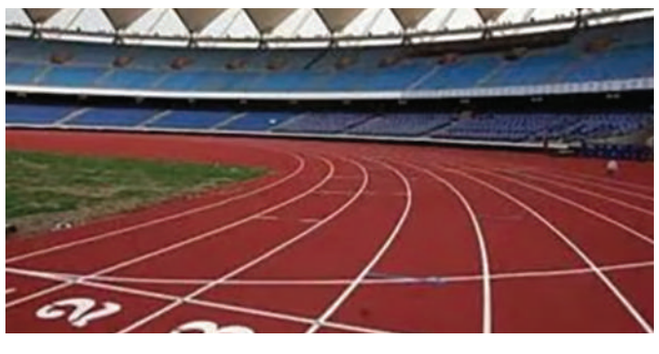


PHOTO: PTI

The Draft Bill states that for a first violation, athletes could face a two-year ban across all competitions besides forfeiture of the medals, titles, and benefits earned fraudulently. For the second one, an athlete will face a permanent ban from competitive sports, besides having an FIR registered under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023.

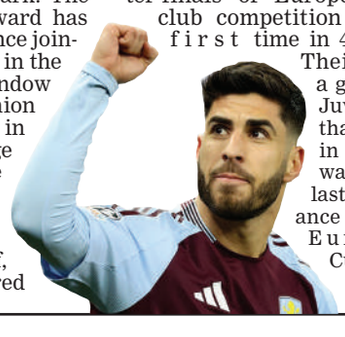
- The Draft NCAAFS 2025 was made public by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports on Wednesday in a bid to invite comments and suggestions from the general public and stakeholders till 31 March.

However, the draft does not mention FIRs against coaches and officials who are deemed to have facilitated or concealed age fraud. Instead, coaches will be suspended and could face a two-year ban for the first confirmed violation and a lifetime debarment from any role within a National Sports Federation (NSF) for a second violation. —*PTI*

Villa beat Club Brugge to book PSG showdown

LONDON, 13 MARCH

Marco Asensio starred as Aston Villa beat 10-man Club Brugge 3-0 on Wednesday to book a Champions League quarter-final clash with Paris Saint-Germain. Asensio came off the bench to strike twice in the second half of the last-16 second leg at Villa Park. The in-form Spanish forward has netted seven times since joining on loan from PSG in the January transfer window and is set for a reunion with his parent club in the last eight. Brugge had Kyriani Sabbe sent off for a professional foul on Marcus Rashford early in the first half, and Asensio ensured Villa eventually took advantage.

Ian Maatsen scored in between Asensio's brace as Unai Emery's side romped to a 6-1 aggregate victory.

With Prince William, a noted Villa fan, celebrating in the stands, the Premier League outfit are through to the quarter-finals of Europe's elite club competition for the first time in 42 years. Their exit against Juventus at that stage in 1982-83 was Villa's last appearance in the European Cup —*PTI*